THE IMPERIAL GUPTAS

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by

O. P. SINGH BHATIA, M.A.

Foreword by

SHRI PREM KIRPAL
Educational Adviser and Secretary to the Government of India,
Ministry of Education,
New Delhi



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Late Shri R. L. Bhatia

Father of the Author



Thy memory sweet I summon into bloom,
Beloved Soul, with this my votive tome.

FOREWORD

I feel great pleasure in recommending this book on the Imperial Guptas to the serious students of History who will find it a very valuable compilation of the latest researches in this field. The author, Shri O.P. Singh Bhatia, has done his best to present his material in the form of interesting narrative. The age of the Imperial Guptas forms a great episode in the history and civilization of the Indian peoples and the historians' search for presenting a picture of this fascinating period will never cease. Shri O.P. Singh Bhatia's work is a valuable contribution to historical writing on the period of Imperial Guptas.

(PREM KIRPAL)
Educational Adviser and Secretary
to the Government of India,
Ministry of Education,
NEW DELHI.

June 20, 1961.

PREFACE

The Imperial Gupta period has always held a great attraction for the historians as it contains some of the most romantic figures of the Indian history. The fact that I have succumbed to this attraction cannot, however, be attributed solely to this romantic atmosphere. There was something more substantial than this which influenced me and has throughout been my guiding star while the variegated scenes of the hoary past flitted past the vision of my mind. My mission in recording things which have already been recorded by so many others, much more learned and wise than myself, is to present true portraits of the imperial personages who made this period as unique and as glorious as themselves, and the ways in which they made their impress upon both the contemporary world and the future generations. My effort has been to portray the genius of the emperors who elevated this country to rank among the highly civilised nations of all times, and to delineate the various elements and constituents which went to form the superb fabric of history of their period. This has necessitated delving into both the personal characteristics of the emperors, which are always the mould into which the structure of a despotic country is cast, and the external influences and circumstances under which they had to wield their sceptres.

In spite of the various discordant factors which still exist to mar the harmony of the history of ancient India, though less pronounced in this period, I have tried to steer clear of these whirlpools and give a connected account of the whole history of this period. In this endeavour I have tried to utilise all the modern researches in this field carried out by laborious and patient seekers after truth. In this direction I admit that I have been quite ambitious but then that is my justification of adding yet another book on the subject to several others which already exist. To say this may seem apologetic to some of my readers but that is not the truth. I am confident that my book will meet the long-felt

necessity of a volume which could be comprehensive, bring together all the latest theories and discoveries, and also make an interesting reading without being 'dry'.

I would fail in my duty if I do not acknowledge my heartfelt gratitude to the various authorities in this field who had been pioneers in this field and lent their superhuman intellect to clear away the cowebs and prickly bushes from the road of the history of this period. I have freely drawn on their experiences. The lamps lighted by Drs. Fleet, Smith, Jayaswal, Majumdar, Mookerji, Altekar, Sinha, Upadhayaya Dikshitar, Saletore and Allan have been my guiding stars on the way. These are only a few of the galaxy who have made their permanent mark on the ancient Indian history. I have given a more exhaustive list at the end of the book for those who may like to go in much more detail.

I am grateful to the Archaeological Survey of India for thier kind permission to use the text of inscriptions as deciphered by Dr. Fleet and also to lend me photographs of various historical monuments, statues and coins. I am also thankful to Shri Parab, Librarian, Archaeological Survey of India to extend to me his full co-operation and free use of the library.

I am extremely grateful to Sarvshri Indar Nath, S.S. Bhalla, G.S. Madan, Ishwar Dutt and V.K. Sankaran, who very patiently and laboriously went through the manuscript and made many valuable suggestions. My thanks are also due to Sarvshri R.K. Grover, Parkash Chander and Kashmiri Lal who lent their willing co-operation to decipher the manuscript and undertook the labour to type it out. Without the ungrudging support and constant encouragement of my wife Shrimati Darshan Kaur, all along, I am sure it would not have been possible for me even to launch upon this venture.

And last but not least I would like to record my most sincere thanks to Shri Prem Kirpal, Secretary to the Government of India, Ministry of Education who spared his precious time to go through my book and favour me with his valuable comments in the form of a foreword.

20-F, Nauroji Nagar,
New Delhi.

O. P. Singh Bhatia

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INTRODUCTION

In the annals of Indian history there have been many alternative periods of light and darkness when the tempo of civilization rose to the highest crescendo and then fell to the depth of oblivion. These crests and troughs are a characteristic of the story of this ancient land of ours. At some places these are so well pronounced that we cannot help wondering at the elasticity of Indian genius. Its tremendous power forces on us the recognition of its unique and masterful dynamism. The student of history finds a latent momentum in the structure of Indian culture which is always there at its core. Whenever the progressive forces have run down, it is this momentum which has helped it to move on, though at a slower pace but still onwards, till new factors and agencies of power enabled it to regain its equilibrium.

However, this theory of growth and synthesis of Indian culture and civilisation may not in fact hold ground when further evidence about the so-called dark periods of history becomes available as a result of researches and excavations of ancient sites. It is only because of the lack of sufficient impartial and reliable material and contemporary evidence that we are led to presume that during these periods, history did not record any noticeable advance and there was no factor forceful enough to focus our attention. This line of thought is borne out by the manner in which the Indian history has developed from a collection of fables, anecdotes, legends, myths and stories into a more or less connected account. With the increase in the amount of material made available to us as a result of long, laborious and patient researches, studies, excavations and discussions, the number and extent of the dark patches have decreased. The elevations in the graph of the curve of growth of Indian culture and civilisation are more in number. It may perhaps be possible to visualise the future history of India as a running account of the achievements of the people and the development of their culture.

Till that time is reached we shall have to view the various periods only relatively. Considered from this angle, the period of Indian history which was dominated by the Imperial Guptas stand out pre-eminent. It was a mile-stone on the highway of the Indian culture. It contributed its lustre to every field of culture and civilisation; Sanskrit got its perfect form; Epics, Puranas and other popular Brahmanical literature was re-written and various new literary forms were evolved. These included court epic, prose romances, fables and drama. This period was fortunate to have the greatest poet Kalidasa. His contributions to Indian drama and poetry are unsurpassed, and are even today considered as priceless gems of indigenous literature. Only less renowned than him was Bhartrihari, the Indian Horace, whose wit, humour and versatile genius contributed to every conceivable form of literary gymnastics.

Even the religion could not escape the rejuvenating influence of the time. Vishnu, as the Preserver, Siva as the Destroyer and Krishna as the Absolute One stand out as the symbols of progress in the sphere of philosophy. Buddhism probably received its death-blow when Buddha was recognised in the pantheon of Brahmanism as the incarnation of Vishnu. The theory of avataras of Vishnu in various forms made the Brahmanism more dynamical and hence appealing to the common mind. It, therefore, recovered the ground lost by it during Mauryan period when Buddhism, with its popular lore in the form of Jataka tales, had outstripped Brahmanism in its appeal to the people. This new type of Brahmanism, with its popular literature, elastic rules and elaborate, fascinating ceremonials was the Hinduism, the fount of modern predominant religion of India, Nepal and a few islands in the East Indies.

In the field of Science, this period saw the perfection of several branches of knowledge. Astronomy, medicine, physics, chemistry and mathematics received the impress of progress. Discovery of the laws of gravitation and the evolution of the theory of Zero between themselves contribute not a little to the making of the Imperial Gupta period, the Golden age of Indian history. Several geniuses

flourished during this time and joined hands to fabricate the texture of glory for Guptas.

But all this would not have been possible if there had been no peace in the land. This was ensured by the strong arms of a continuous line of capable and mighty monarchs who, by their stern discipline and efficient administration gave to the country a long spell of rest, peace and tranquilty. In such an atmosphere sprouted the varied coloured sweet flowers making this land beautiful and happy. The vast domains of these emperors brought the whole of the country into contact with the West, really effectively, for the first time, in the matter of trade and commerce with tremendous results. With the Roman gold also flowed the culture of distant lands into Aryavarta. This contact with the hitherto unknown world resulted in a cultural synthesis of unparalleled beauty.

This era of culture and beauty of Ajanta frescoes, Bagh paintings and Bhitargaon sculpture was not destined to continue for ever. It would have been a pity. Who knows to what extent it would have degenerated in the end; like Greek? or Egyptian? or Roman? or other civilizations great in their own times? But we notice with relief that Huns came to our rescue. They destroyed the unity of Imperial Guptas thereby releasing centrifugal forces tending to force apart from the imperial fabric. Sakas and other foreign invaders appeared on the stage later on to complete the disintegration of the empire and destroy the temple of civilization, though not the priests or their souls, and to put them to the task of erecting that structure again, modifying the plan of the building with the changed circumstances.

In the following pages is described the story of the erection of this temple of Indian culture during the period of Imperial Guptas, their efforts, their failures, their achievements and above all, their personalities, which, as is very common in monarchical form of government, play a very important role in the shaping of a nation.

PART I

Sources of History

Sources

- Religious Literature
- Secular or Historical Literature
  - Kaumudi-Mahotsava
  - Devi Chandra Guptam
  - Writings of Kalidasa
- Account of Fahien
- Coins or Numismatic evidence
- Inscriptions or Epigraphic evidence
- Old cities, Buildings and works of Art

SOURCES OF HISTORY

Alberuni, who accompanied the armies of Mahmud Gaznavi, describes Indians as singularly backward in the art of writing history. He has stated that instead of approaching the historical facts directly, they indulge in the narration of long stories. More recent historians like Mount-Stuart, Elphinstone and Dr. Fleet bemoan the uncertainty of our dates. According to Elphinstone the ancient historical records are so inextricably mixed up with folk-tales and stories that neither head nor tail can be made out of them.

This criticism may not be wholly unjustified, but labelling Indians as totally ignorant in the art of writing history appears a biased opinion. It was their ill-luck to be placed in the category of the backward countries, due to the destruction of their records, by too frequent aggressions by the foreign invaders and other factors. It is true that India has not produced any great historian like Herodotus, who could compile her long and splendid annals in a chronological order. The turbid circumstances which prevailed, the calamities which befell the unfortunate country, and mutual discord and disunity among its petty rulers proved to be major obstacles in the way of writing history. The small independent states, into which the country was parcelled out, were always at war with one another and whatever was chronicled in a particular state was destroyed when another hostile state vanquished it. The Huns played havoc with the civilization of India and not even a single institution of learning escaped their ruthlessness during the period of their barbaric rule. When viewed against these handicaps, at a time when the people had to struggle desperately to maintain their body and soul together, it is a pity to call Indians as ignorant in the art of writing history.

However, whatever records of this period are available were reduced to writing by the Brahmanas because only they knew how to read and write. They were indifferent

towards writing history and whatever they wrote in this connection is tinged with religious sentimentalism. These historical records were mainly kept in the temples, where they were destroyed along with the temples by Muslim invaders in their religious fanaticism.

We cannot call India as a disunited country during the entire ancient period. The great empires of Nandas, Mauryas and Guptas were very extensive. In course of time they also tottered down and the destruction of valuable records of their governments followed in the wake of their downfall due to foreign invasions and internal dis-integration but they left behind the impress of their unique and sublime culture and civilization.

Notwithstanding various difficulties and drawbacks stated above, we are still in a position to write enough about the glorious period of the Imperial Guptas and can conclude that the Indians were in no way behind any other nation of the West with regards to their culture and civilization. What is needed is a reconstruction of their history and its keen and close study and without doubt it would be found to be outstanding in the contemporary history of the other nations of the world. To Dr. Fleet and General Cunningham is due the credit of bringing into limelight the history of the Guptas mainly through their inscriptions. Dr. Fleet, in particular, has worked very hard on the chronology of the period and has been able to give sequence to some of the dates—commencing from the accession of Chandra Gupta I, onwards. Mr. Allan, Dr. V.A. Smith and Dr. A.S. Altekar carried out a minute study and a critical analysis of the Gupta coins. Dr. V.A. Smith writes that with the accession of Guptas, light again dawns, the veil of oblivion is lifted and the history of India regains unity and interest.

It is from the following six different sources that we gain an insight into the history of this period :

1. Religious literature.
2. Secular or Historical literature.
3. Account of Fahien.

4. Coins or numismatic evidence.
5. Inscriptions or epigraphic evidence.
6. Old cities, buildings and works of art.

1. RELIGIOUS LITERATURE

In the religious literature of the Gupta period the eighteen Puranas occupy the foremost position. Majority of them were written during this period. Some western scholars hold the view that these have been written in an exaggerated form. However, their critical and careful study is very helpful to the students of history interested in the building up and reconstruction of the edifice of the history of the Gupta period. The Puranas, like the other religious books, are the store-houses of religious philosophy of ancient India. These are written in a systematic way but only their fifth part deals with the political history of the country.

Elphinstone says that these cannot be relied upon for the history of the past. It may be true to some extent but to ignore the Puranas altogether will be a folly. These are a valuable source of history except for some controversial points in them.

We do find at places that their historical facts are too sketchy and meagre, but we get such information from them as no other sources are in a position to supply. Some historians attach great importance to these and call these as the fifth Veda. An impartial student of history, after their careful examination, will agree that there is plenty of historical truth in these in spite of their several shortcomings and defects.

The term Purana is a generic title of a particular class of ancient books. Generally, each Purana consists of five parts. The first part contains a mention of the creation; the second part deals with recreation; the third with genealogy; the fourth relates to the cosmic cycles; and the fifth part gives details of the ruling dynasties, and is the most important from the historical point of view. These have been recorded in the form of anecdotes, songs, and lores

which have come down to us through the ages. Some of the stories have become town-talk and are passed on from one generation to the other in the form of historical and religious stories. All these are very helpful in getting an insight into the political, social and economic conditions prevailing in the country during the ancient days. They thus form valuable source of history of the origin and early period of Gupta history.

On the basis of a mention of Puranas in Mahabharta Dr. Macdonell concludes that the Puranas were written at a very early date and not during the Gupta period. Other scholars, however, do not support this view and hold that the portion of Mahabharta wherein Puranas have been mentioned might have been an addition to Mahabharta at some later stage. The Puranas, in fact, were not the product of a single age. In their original form they were merely religious books and the current social customs and rites were incorporated in these during the Gupta period. In some cases the additions and alterations were made to such a large extent that these completely lost their original character. Inspired by some such distorted versions of the Puranas, some of the Western writers have declared these as incorrect history.

From the study of Puranas we gather that before the rise of the Imperial Guptas, India was parcelled out into many small states which were governed by foreigners like Sakas, Yavanas and Bahlikas. They had let loose such a tyrannical rule in the country that they have been described as "the kings of churlish spirit, violent temper and ever addicted to falsehood and unrighteousness."[1A] These rulers, according to Puranas, inflicted death upon women, children and cows, and seized the property of others. With their eyes always fixed upon their neighbours, they neither knew peace for themselves, nor did they allow their neighbours to rule in peace. Their internal rivalries sapped the vigour of the Indian states and with the prevalence of chaos and anarchy, social and economic conditions in the country were very adversely affected. The Puranas thus draw a

1A. Dr. R.C. Hazra

graphic picture of the conditions : "Wealth and Piety will decrease day by day until the world would be wholly depraved. Then property alone will confer rank; wealth will be the only source of Dharma; passion will be the sole bond of union between sexes; false-hood will be the only means of success in litigation; and women will be objects of merely sexual gratification....The people, unable to bear the heavy burden imposed upon them by their avaricious sovereigns, will take refuge among the valleys of the mountains and will be glad to feed upon (wild) honey, herbs, roots, fruits, leaves and flowers".[1] However, with the rise of the Guptas the conditions changed altogether. India again experienced the boons of political unity, social advancement, economic prosperity and religious freedom.

The first of the Puranas is known as the *Markandeya Purana*. It consists of 9,000 verses and is considered as the oldest and the most important among the existing ones. It has all the five characteristics which have been mentioned above and seems to have been written at different times. According to Pargiter "the Devi Mahatmya—the latest part —was certainly complete in the ninth century A.D.; the third and the fifth parts, which constituted the original Purana, were most probably in existence in the third century and perhaps even earlier, and the first and second parts were composed between those two periods." It gives a picture of the society of the time and the duties of a son of Kshatriya. For instance, it says that "the wife being an essential part of life, should be protected even if not of a good temperament. A wife is a potent cause of righteousness, wealth and love among men, and, in particular, one who forsakes her, has, in sooth, abandoned righteousness".[2]

The second Purana is known as the *Vayu Purana*. It is mentioned even in Mahabharta and is also one of the oldest extant Puranas. Bana mentions it in his Harsha-Charitra and Alberuni in his Tahqiq-ul-Hind. It contains 24,000 shlokas and has all the five characteristics mentioned above. It depicts the social conditions prevailing during that period, prescribes the duties of the castes and ashramas

1&2. Dr. R.C. Hazra

and mentions the penances in vogue for the various offences.

The third is the *Brahmanda Purana*. It was considered to be a part of Vayu Purana during the earlier periods. However, it seems to have been split up sometime during the fourth century A.D., perhaps due to the sectarian troubles, as is evident from a few chapters of this Purana, written against Vaishnavism.

Vishnu Purana is the fourth Purana and is considered as very important. It represents at its best the sectarian Puranas. Although it is mainly Vaishnavite in its teaching, it still retains, with considerable faithfulness, the characteristics of the ancient non-sectarian Puranas. It deals with Smriti matters. According to Pargiter "it is a late Purana, composed as a single whole upon a consistent plan, and not a mere collection of materials of various times like Vayu, Brahma and Matsya. From the treatment of Buddhism and Jainism in it it appears to have been composed after the Brahmanism had regained its supremacy. It cannot therefore be earlier than the fifth century A.D. It is Brahmanical." Winternitz does not assign it a much later date. Farquhar places the Harivamsa not later than 400 A.D. and as the Vishnu Purana is so like it in most of its features he opines that probably it belongs to the same general date. Vishnu Purana is the best preserved of all the Puranas in so far as its text is concerned. There are not many subsequent accretions and alterations in this Purana, as in the case of others, in the later period.

Matsya Purana is the fifth Purana. There is a controversy concerning its date of compilation and the determination of exact date is very difficult at present. It was considerably changed later on. The chapters which deal with the kings of the Lunar and Solar dynasties are useful from the historical point of view. The persons who strictly abide by the rules of the four stages of life and caste-system have been given much importance in it. It says that the houses of such persons are the holy places or tirthas in themselves.

The sixth Purana is the *Bhagwata*. It is divided into 12 parts and deals with Bhagavatism. Some chapters

seem to have been written during the sixth century A.D. It is therefore not of a later period. It deals with the condition of religion at that time.

The *Kurma Purana* is seventh in the list. It is divided into two parts, namely, Purana and Uttara and is important for its chapters on Hindu customs and laws. Its first two chapters are very outstanding and the whole of the work is dependent on these. Alterations and changes seem to have been so freely carried out in this Purana that it seems to have lost its original character. Special significance has been attached by it to a house-holder in the society of the times. It says that the house-holder's stage is the best of all as it is the source of other three stages of life wholly dependent on it. This point of view has been supported by the Vedas wherein also a glowing tribute has been paid to this stage of life. This is the only stage wherein a person can, by his noble actions and deeds, carve out for himself a place in the next world.

The eighth is the *Vamana Purana*. It describes the hell and the heaven—the reward and the punishment which a person is to get in consequence of his actions. It contains a description of the duties of the different castes and ashrams and the daily food which the common people of that period were accustomed to take.

Linga Purana is ninth in order of compilation and importance. Apparently it was written sometime between 600 A.D. and 1000 A.D. It is dedicated to Lord Shiva and tells us about the different mantras and the prayers in vogue, as well as the funeral sacrifices performed by the people of those times as a part of their daily routine.

Varaha Purana, the tenth Purana, contains a commentary on funeral sacrifices, the duties of people and different objects of worship. It prescribes different types of penance for various offences. There are references of cerain holy places in it. Generally, it is considered as a religious book.

The eleventh is the *Padma Purana*. This Purana is known for the information it provides about the different castes and the position of the society at that time. It describes the duties of a Brahmana, the importance of Gayatri and

its chanting. It tells us about the various ways in which a Brahmana may earn his livelihood. It lays down the duties of the society towards him. A picture of the position of the women at that time has been drawn and their duties before and after marriage have been laid down. It also contains information on diverse topics like construction of dams, reservoirs and other works of public utility, the importance of "Tulsi Plant", the glories of the Ganges, the worship of Ganesha and other gods and goddesses, etc.

Brhannaradiya and Naradiya Purana comes next and seems to have been written sometime during the ninth century A.D. It is not of much use from the historical point of view.

Agni Purana was also composed during the ninth century. It deals with the holy places, worship of deities, duties of different castes and ashrams, marriage customs and the ways of purification of defiled things. It tells about the hell and the heaven and the duties of the kings. Presumably a few chapters on the worship and maintenance of fire and the performance of mudras were added later on.

Garuda Purana was written sometime during the tenth century A.D. It contains information about various ways of worship, the ceremonies of the investiture of the sacred thread, consecration of images and performance of various Hindu rites. A few chapters on the hell, the method of burning a man and the funeral sacrifices seem to have been added to it later.

Besides the above, we have four more Puranas, viz., *Brhma Purana*, *Skanda Purana*, *Brahma Vaivarta Purana* and *Bhavisya Purana*. The last one tells us about the different titles adopted by the different Gupta rulers. It says that Chandra Gupta II was the only one among the Gupta rulers who assumed the title of Vikramaditya. The other six Gupta rulers have been listed as follows :

Chandra Gupta I	Vijayaditya
Samudra Gupta	Asokaditya
Kumara Gupta I	Mahendraditya
Skanda Gupta	Parakramaditya

Nrisimha Gupta	Baladitya
Kumara Gupta II	Kramaditya

Thus, from the study of these Puranas we gather information about social, economic and religious conditions prevailing during the Gupta period. Some chapters, which have been added in the end, deal with kingship, the obligations of the rulers towards the people and the duties of their subjects towards them. These are an invaluable source for the early history of the Imperial Guptas. They help us in determining the exact period of the rise of some of the small states, both dependent and independent. The Vayu and Brahmanda Puranas tell us that the Gupta rule came after the decline of the Nagas in Bihar. Vishnu Purana, however, differs and according to its version the Guptas and the Nagas were contemporaries and it was during the period of Samudra Gupta that Nagas were completely exterminated by his imperial forces in the Uttar Pradesh region. Dr. Jayaswal has compiled the early history of the Guptas on the basis of the information gathered from these Puranas.

2. SECULAR OR HISTORICAL LITERATURE

In the Puranas the facts of history are so intermingled with religion that it often becomes impossible to disentangle the details of social, economic, or political conditions of the country. However, the secular literature, like the works of contemporary writers, viz. Vijjakka, Visakhadutta, Kalidasa, etc. unravel, sometimes in minute details, the facts about the social, political and economic life of the people, their cultural achievements, laws of land, manoeuvres of the persons at the helm of affairs, which culminated in major historical events, etc. A brief study of the relevant works of the aforesaid writers will be very helpful here.

(a) *Kaumudi-Mahotsava :* It is a contemporary play written by Vijjaka and 'gives details of the life of Chandra Gupta I, the first important ruler of the Gupta dynasty. It narrates the story of a popular ruler of Magadha, named Sundara Varman. He had more than one wife but no son.

He grew old and adopted Chandasena, a Kshatriya boy of Magadha. Chandasena grew up and was destined to be t . successor of the ruler of Magadha. After some time, however, a son was born to one of his queens. He was named as Kalyanasree. The ruler began to show more affection to Kalyanasree and this led to estrangement of relations between him and Chandasena. The Lichchhavis were sworn enemies of the Magadhan king. Chandasena made an alliance with them and besieged Magadha. Sundara Varman died fighting and Chandasena became the ruler of Magadha. Prince Kalyanasree escaped to Mathura and there married a princess of Mathura named Kirtimati.

Chandasena grew suspicious of some of the people of Magadha and let loose a tyrannical rule in the country. He imprisoned many leading citizens. His Minister was inclined towards the fugitive prince and enjoyed the confidence of the city council of Pataliputra which had the right of electing a king. Meanwhile, a rebellion broke out on the frontiers of the empire. Chandasena, the newly elected king, marched forth to quell it. Taking advantage of his absence the rebellious elements within the country made a bid to liberate it from an unpopular king. They invited Kalyanasree to occupy the throne and declared him as the ruler of Magadha. Chandasena tried to retrieve his position but failed and was killed in battle.

Dr. K.P. Jayaswal has tried to prove that this Chandasena was in fact Chandragupta who dropped 'Sena' and added 'Gupta' at the end of his name. Dandin, a contemporary writer, has also made a reference to this play in his account.

The play gives not only a graphic picture of the political conditions of the country but it also portrays the social and religious conditions of the time. According to it the Saivism was very popular and was the religion of the State. Lord Siva ruled over the actions of the kings and the people and all the national services were dedicated to him. The Shastras which had been relegated to the background during the Buddhist revival regained their supreme position. Siva was no more considered as a god of destruction but was

represented as one who dispels the darkness of ignorance. The Buddhism was on the decline.

Women were respected. They were permitted to move about freely and could visit the residences of their lovers as is clear from an extract : "On the royal road are heard the girdles of the beauties, noisy with jingling sound —beauties setting themselves out alone at night for the residence of their beloveds."[3] The kings were permitted to marry more than one wife. Gambling was still in vogue although it was resorted to by the low class people. The city council still enjoyed a very privileged position and could elect as well as depose a king.

In it Dr. Jayaswal notices a valuable source of history of the early Gupta period. Other historians, however, do not attach any political significance to this play. They contend that Chandasena of this play was definitely not Chandra Gupta I. The Allahabad Pillar Inscription clearly indicates that Maharajadhiraja Chandra Gupta I was son of Ghatotkacha, who was a Maharaja although not a Maharajadhiraja. If Chandra Gupta I was the son of a Maharaja, it was certainly impossible for the ruler of Magadha to pick him up for adoption. A point in the play which lacks conviction is the lower birth of Chandasena. It is not clear how the ruler of Magadha, himself a Brahmana, consented to the adoption of a boy who belonged to a lower caste. Another controversial point which needs clarification is that the Lichchhavis were ruling in Magadha and Chandra Gupta I inherited fortunes of his relations through his marriage. How could the Lichchhavis and the Sena rulers rule at one and the same time over the Kingdom of Magadha?

There are thus many points which need careful examination. Further research and discoveries may help us to settle these points. However, at present we can only say that with all its short comings, this play has thrown considerable light on the origin and rise of the Gupta dynasty and the historical data in it have solved many a riddle in

3. S.R. Shastri's translation.

the early Gupta history, which, otherwise, would have remained unresolved.

(b) *Devichandra Guptam :* It is a political drama and was written by Visakhadutta. Unfortunately, like Indika, its original text has been lost and is available to us only in the form of references to it in contemporary and later records. It is an important piece of history of Rama Gupta, a son of Samudra Gupta, who is taken to be the immediate successor of Samudra Gupta by some historians. He is believed to have ruled over the Imperial Gupta empire between the interval of the death of Samudra Gupta and the accession of Chandra Gupta II, authentic details of which period are not forth-coming at present. The story of this political drama has been confirmed by contemporary and later historical records like Bana's Harsha-Charitra and *Majmalu-t-Tawarikh* and a few coins. Except for some points which are controversial the details of this drama are considered to be historical facts.

From some of its extracts we gather that Rama Gupta was defeated by a Saka chief in the battle and compelled to enter into an ignominious agreement with his enemy. He consented to surrender his Queen Dhruva Devi to the victor.

The story, as it can be pieced together from scattered references, goes that some time after the accession of Rama Gupta, a Saka chief broke into an open revolt and refused to acknowledge his supremacy. This Saka chief seems to have his seat of government somewhere in Malwa according to some historians, but some others have tried to prove that he was a chief of Mathura. A few writers have stated him to be a Kushan chief of the hilly regions of Himalayas. The matter remains undecided yet. Whosoever he might have been it seems that Rama Gupta led a splendid army against him. It could not break through his defences as the enemy was strongly entrenched in the hilly regions. Rama Gupta was thus compelled to fall back and was pursued by the enemy very vigorously. He was compelled to take shelter in a hill fort. The enemy invested the fort very successfully and made the situation so hopeless and desperate for the Imperial Gupta army that Rama Gupta was

compelled to sue for peace. The Saka chief exploited the situation to the maximum and asked for the surrender of Queen Dhruva Devi, who was known for her beauty. Rama Gupta, with the approval of his minister, agreed to this disgraceful settlement. When this became known to the Queen, she was naturally very much distressed. She asked for the help of Prince Chandra Gupta, the younger brother of Rama Gupta, who was also accompanying the expedition and was known for his resourcefulness and bravery. The settlement was condemned by the whole of the royal camp and this emboldened Chandra Gupta to put forward a counter suggestion to his brother. Besides the Queen, the Saka chief had also asked for the hands of the daughters of royal Gupta officers for his own officers. Chandra Gupta chalked out a plan to avenge this humiliation. He, in the company of some hundreds of youngmen, proceeded to the camp of the Saka chief, in the guise of women. Once inside the lines of the enemy the brave youngmen fell upon them, killed the Saka Chief and won for their leader the title of Sakari. Bana thus confirms this episode in his Harsha-Charitra "The Saka King was killed while courting the wife of another."

Some recent researches on the subject have led Dr. Altekar to state that "on the death of Samudra Gupta insurrections broke out in various parts of the empire. Certain tribes, hitherto allies of Guptas (Khasas or Sakas), became a menace on the northern borders. Rama Gupta tried to purchase peace by surrendering his queen Dhruva Devi to the enemy. Ram Gupta's brother Chandra Gupta, however, saved both queen and the empire by a bold coup and took reins of the government into his own hands. He himself became the emperor and married Dhruva Devi."

The foregoing opinion of Dr. Altekar and the story of the cowardice of Ram Gupta have raised many controversial questions which cannot be solved satisfactorily. From the 8th line of Mathura Stone Inscription of Chandra Gupta II, which runs as follows, it is evident that he was a son of Samudra Gupta from queen Dutta Devi (the most powerful, favourite and chief queen of Samudra Gupta, who

won great privilege by inclusion of her name in the royal coins) and was accepted by his father as his heir:—

"By him who is the son,—accepted by him, (and) begotten of the Mahadevi Dutta Devi,—of the *Maharajadhiraj* (the glorious) Samundra Gupta." (Fleet).

Some writers have advanced a theory that on the advice of the royal council the king might have nominated Rama Gupta, the eldest son, as his successor, who therefore ascended the throne after him.

This theory, however, cannot be taken for granted, as the eldest son did not necessarily succeed his father. There are several instances of wars of succession in the ancient Indian history. Asoka ascended the throne after killing his 99 brothers in a civil war. Moreover, it is difficult to believe that the claims of Chandra Gupta II, darling of the army, and unlike his coward brother Rama Gupta, a brave soldier and an able administrator, could be set aside lightly, especially when he was selected for the throne by his father. However, even if it is presumed that the council set aside his candidature in favour of Rama Gupta and the latter became a king, it is surprising that Chandra Gupta II quietly submitted to this treatment and there was a peaceful succession. In view of this changeover an estrangement of relations between the two brothers would have followed automatically. It is therefore not understood how Chandra Gupta could still stay on at the royal court after the accession of his brother Rama Gupta and how both of them could reconcile to this embarrassing situation. These points need cogent arguments to convince us of their soundness.

This victory made Chandra Gupta very popular and taking advantage of it he conspired with Dhruva Devi, who had since been estranged with Rama Gupta, and organised a coup. Rama Gupta was killed and Chandra Gupta was hailed as the ruler.

Mujmalu-t-Tawarikh gives a detailed account of this incident with slight variation. Presumably, in this account, Rawwal was Rama Gupta and Chandra Gupta II was Bara-Kamaris. It is stated that the popularity of Chandra

Gupta II was an eye-sore to his elder brother Rama Gupta. His jealousy led Chandra Gupta II to disappear from the political scene and the royal court for a short time. One summer noon he entered the royal palace in the guise of a mad man. At that time the guards were asleep and there was nobody on the check-post. Rama Gupta and Dhruva Devi were busy in chewing sugar-cane. A small piece of sugar-cane, with a knife (which was probably meant for skinning the sugar-cane) was offered to Chandra Gupta II. The latter made the best use of the opportunity thus offered and killed Rama Gupta with the same knife. The news quickly spread in different directions but the people mostly seemed to be apathetic to the incident. This enabled Chandra Gupta II to get both the throne as well as the queen. In accordance with the Hindu laws Chandra Gupta II could not marry the wife of his elder brother. He was probably given this concession as a special case, as he was the protector of the queen. Perhaps, it may be explained by the axiom that the beauty is for him who can take risks for its sake.

Dr. Bhandarkar, however, is reluctant to accept even the existence of a king of the name of Rama Gupta as it occurs only once in the text of Devi Chandra Guptam. Dr. Jayaswal also holds the same opinion. He has tried to prove by identifying 'R' with 'K' and 'M' with 'C' that it was in fact a ruler named as 'Kaca Gupta' who was either a brother of Samudra Gupta vanquished by him at the time of his accession or was the original name of Samudra Gupta himself (title of 'Samudra' seemed to have been taken by him when his empire had extended as far as the 'sea').

Dr. R.C. Majumdar and Dr. A.S. Altekar have questioned the authenticity of the story. They write that "it is difficult, for instance, to believe that the inheritor of the mighty empire of Samudra Gupta could be so decisively defeated by a Saka king that he had no means of saving his army or kingdom save by consenting to an act, which would be regarded as the most ignominious by any king in any age or country, not to speak of the mighty emperor of the

golden age of India, who had the blood of Samudra Gupta running in his veins".

In the face of all this we can say that in spite of the fact that there are so many disputed points, and various details lack the force of conviction, the drama gives us on the whole a fairly long account of a period about which all the other records are silent and is therefore an important piece of record for the Imperial Gupta history.

(c) *Writings of Kalidasa:* In India the exceptional ability or genius of an individual has normally been attributed to a special divine favour than to their hard work and vast experience. Panini, Tulsi Das and Kalidasa, the three outstanding figures in the realm of Indian literature, have been included in this category. Controversy is still there about the age in which Kalidasa, the great playwright, lived. According to some writers Vikramaditya of Ujjain fame, at whose court Kalidasa flourished, was not Chandra Gupta Vikramaditya of the Gupta dynasty. It is, of course, a confirmed fact now that there did flourish a Kalidasa at the court of Chandra Gupta Vikramaditya, although it is difficult to say whether he was the same Kalidasa who was the author of Shakuntala, Malavikagnimitra, Raghuvamsa, etc., or some one else.

The dramas of Kalidasa may be considered as fabulous legends by the general readers but a student of history will find them as repository of the conditions then prevalent in the country. Kalidasa represents in himself the advancement and progress of the Indian society of his times in the field of refined literature. A critical study of his works gives us an insight into not only the politics but also the social customs and the legal institutions of the time. Being a contemporary of the great Gupta monarch, Chandra Gupta II, his testimony helps us to resolve many riddles and controversial points of Gupta history. A critical examination of a few extracts from his works will bear out this statement.

From the study of Raghuvamsa it is evident that Kalidasa had a regular education. He seemed to have studied very extensively. He had a sound knowledge of Rig Veda

and other Brahmanical works. He was also fully conversant with the religious and secular laws of the time and knew the different sciences of the time very well. His all-round knowledge makes his work all the more important and useful.

In Malavikagnimitra he shows his insight not only in the various types of dances but also in the use of various musical instruments. It helps us to know the various ways of entertainment resorted to by the people and their proficiency in the arts known to them. It would not be out of place to quote here two extracts from his description of a young girl and the visualisation of nature. "The several features of her body were now gradually brought into relief by the touch of youth as the different parts of a picture in outline take shapes by degrees under the painter's brush". "Let there be in front a rippling stream of river, flanked on either side with lowly hills and having couples of swans seated on its sandy expanse in unconcerned repose and let there be a luxuriant tree behind, with a few bark garments fluttering on its branches, underneath which I should like to paint a hind rubbing her left eye languidly against the horn of an antelope."[4]

The importance of wife and children and the honour and love which the people bestowed on them in that age is thus described by Kalidasa in Shakuntala: "She was not only the queen of my house-hold but my best counsellor in need, my bosom friend to share the burden of my heart, my dearest pupil in fine arts...The performance of religious duties is impossible without them... They are indispensable to successful negotiations in marriage affairs... Their word is law to men in the matter of the daughter's disposal. Devoted wives never cross the wishes of their husbands... Though they rival the lotus in delicacy, yet surpass the durability of gold in hardships."[5]

"Blessed are those mortals who are soiled by the dust of their children's limbs—the children which run to their lap with guile-less smiles that reveal the lustre of their budding teeth, the children that prattle forth delightful nothings in sweet and indistinct accents."[6]

4, 5, 6. Vikrama Volume.

Kalidasa seems to have stayed at the royal court for a pretty long time. It is evident from the counsel he gives about the meeting with the rulers at an opportune time, showing patience and restraint when submitting one's case before them and not to be provoked even when insulted by men in authority.

He praises humility about which he writes beautifully in Raghuvamsa. "The trees bend their branches to the ground when laden with fruit, the clouds hang low on the horizon when filled with water, the good become humbler in spirit the higher they rise in greatness."[7]

He also appears to have a taste for romantic life as is clear from an extract of his work : "A sirish flower so placed on her ear as to touch her cheek, but lightly, with its hanging filaments and a necklace of lotus-fibres so drawn over her breasts as to rival the transparency of the autumnal moon-beams."[8]

3. ACCOUNT OF FAHIEN

From time immemorial India has attracted the notice of the foreigners mainly due to two reasons : its riches and its high culture and civilization. To the former category belong the various invaders and conquerors who repeatedly led their armies and laid waste its smiling plains. Some of them took the spoils and left the bleeding country to its fate. Others settled down and made it their homes. The second type is comprised of various scholars who flocked to Indian places of learning and knowledge to gain wisdom. Through them the religions, Hinduism and Buddhism, found their way to the neighbouring regions and became world-wide faiths. The progress of spread of the latter is phenomenal. During the days of Kanishka, it enfolded China and a greater part of the population embraced the new religion. As is invariably the case that the new converts always show greater zeal for the adopted religion, many Chinese were very enthusiastic to see all the places which had any concern with the life of Buddha. In those days there were no proper communications and

7 & 8. Vikrama Volume.

there were many obstacles which a person had to overcome for reaching India. It took several months for a man to cover such a long distance. Many people perished in their attempt to reach India. The Government of China was therefore constrained to impose restrictions on the intending pilgrims and nobody could leave or enter the country without prior permission of that Government. Many Indian scholars, however, visited China to acquaint the Chinese with the teachings of Buddhism. Notwithstanding the dangers involved, many Chinese also visited India with the idea of visiting the Buddhist places and collecting the religious texts. Of these Chinese pilgrims, Fahien and Hieun Tsang are the most celebrated. The pilgrimage of Itsing has not been given much importance because during the period of his visit there was no political unity and the greater part of his account deals with the East Indies. Fahien visited India during the rule of the Guptas and Hieun Tsang came when Harsha was busy in giving a unity to India.

Dr. Radha Kumud Mookerjee has aptly assessed the significance of such pilgrimages to India as a tribute paid by China to the sovereignty of Indian thought which transgressed the geographical confines of India and built up a greater India beyond her northern mountains and southern seas.

Fahien was too much absorbed in the collection of the scriptural texts and was totally indifferent and disinterested towards the Indian political affairs. He does not even mention the name of the king in whose kingdom he lived for a long time. At times, however, he did mention the country and its people when he found something very important, strange or better than China. The very casualness of his remarks makes them valuable. They depict a correct picture of the times.

Indians during that period enjoyed greater freedom than the people of China. They had liberty of speech, expression and movement. Even the foreigners could move about freely. The land tax was very light. Crimes were rare and punishment was very mild. The chandalas (the butchers) were the degraded members of the society.

People hated taking meat. Therefore the chandalas were not allowed to live inside the city walls. They had their separate quarters outside the city. Whenever they entered the city limits they were to have some special identification mark, like a board around their neck or they were to make noise by striking two sticks together to warn the people about their approach so that they may not be defiled by getting into contact with them.

Fahien thus writes, "To the south of this, the country is called the Middle Kingdom (of the Brahmans). It has a temperate climate, without frost or snow; and the people are prosperous and happy without registration or official restrictions. Only those who till the king's land have to pay tax on the profit they make. Those who want to go away, may go; those who want to stay, may stay. The king in his administration uses no corporal punishments; criminals are merely fined according to the gravity of their offences. Even for a second attempt at rebellion the punishment is only the loss of the right hand. The men of the king's bodyguard have all fixed salaries. Throughout the country no one kills any living thing, nor drinks wine, nor eats onions or garlic. In this country they do not keep pigs or fowls, there are no dealings in cattle, no butchers' shops or distilleries in their market places. As a medium of exchange they use cowries. Only chandalas go hunting and deal in flesh."[9] And we can presume that similar might be the conditions in other parts of the country. Dr. V.A. Smith justifiably remarks : "The picture is a pleasing one, on the whole, and proceeds that Vikramaditya was capable of bestowing on his people the benefits of orderly Government in sufficient measure to allow them to grow rich in peace and prosper abundantly."

As stated above, the Chinese pilgrim was only keen to visit holy places of Buddhism and to collect religious literature. Therefore, the greater part of his writings concerns Buddhism and its monasteries.

Fahien visited the city of Kanauj, which was known as the 'city of the hunchbacked maidens'. It

9. H. A. Giles.

was called by this strange name because six princesses of Kanauj became hunchbacked when, one after the other, they refused to marry a great saint. The city of Kanauj is situated on the bank of the Ganges. He came across two monasteries here both belonging to the Lesser Vehicle.

Another remark of his shows that he was very much respected and warmly received for the pains he took and the enthusiasm he showed in making the pilgrimage to India. From his remarks about Sravasti we get the impression that with the decline of Kosala, its capital also lost its position and population.

From his remarks about the important places of Buddhist pilgrimage we can safely conclude that Buddhism was gradually declining. Important Buddhist places had lost their population and were lying desolate. About Kapilvastu he writes : "There is no king; nor people are to be found; it is just like a wilderness, except for priests and some tens of families. On the spot where formerly stood the palace of king Suddhodana, and where images had been erected of the heir apparent (Buddha) and his mother when she dreamt that riding on a white elephant He entered her womb; and where, as heir apparent, when on issuing forth from the East gate of the city, He saw a sick man and turned about his chariot to go home, pagodas have been raised."[10]

He stayed in Pataliputra for a fairly long time and has made a mention of Asokan palaces in glowing language. He was astonished at their structure and remarked that it was the work of the angels and spirits which were commanded by Asoka and not of human beings.

About the people of Central India, Fahien writes : "The elders and gentry of these countries have instituted in their capitals free hospitals, and hither come all poor helpless patients, orphans, widowers and cripples. They are well taken care of, a doctor attends them, food and medicine are being supplied according to their needs. They are all made quite comfortable and when they are cured, they go away."[11]

10 & 11. H. A. Giles.

In the light of the above remarks of Fahien, Dr. V.A. Smith's assessment of situation seems justified that "These particulars, as collected and narrated by the earliest Chinese traveller in India, permit of no doubt that the dominions of Chandra Gupta Vikramaditya were well governed, the authorities interfering as little as possible with the subject... Probably India has never been governed better, after the oriental manner than it was during the reign of Vikramaditya. The Government did not attempt to do too much, but let the people alone, and was accordingly popular."

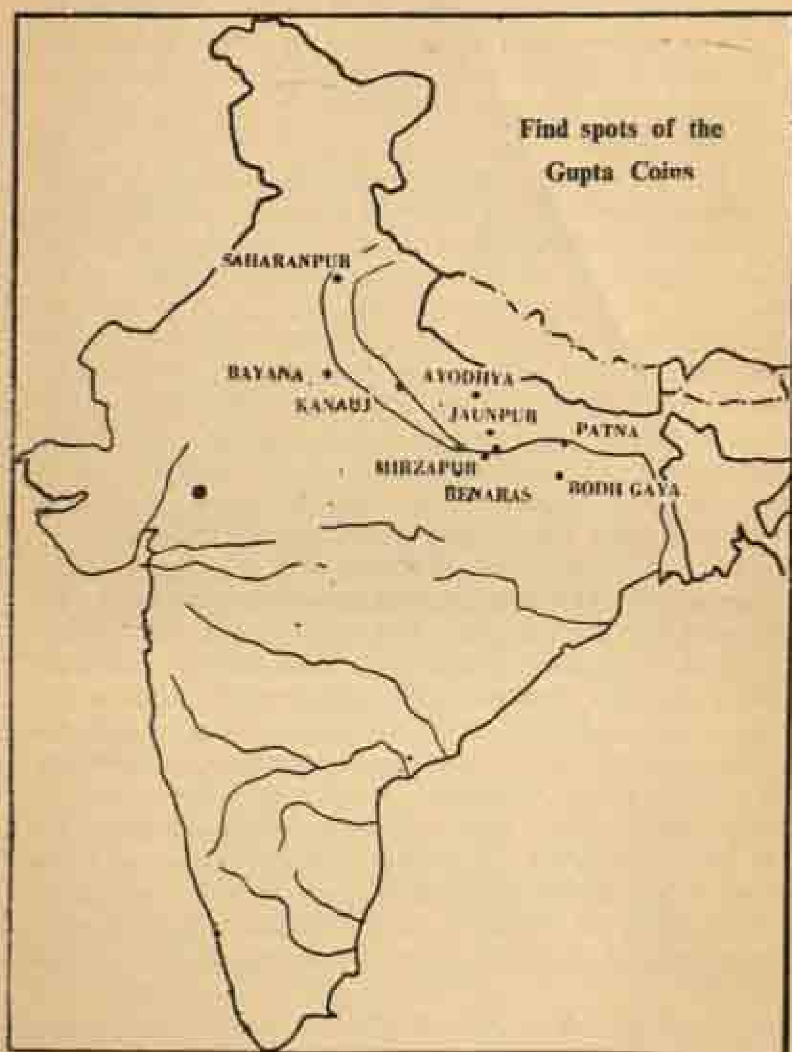
The account of Fahien, thus, not only gives us a description of the cities of India and the Buddhism but it is also very helpful for the study of political, social, economic and religious conditions prevalent in the country at that time. The casual remarks of a disinterested person have much importance and value and can safely be relied upon for the true portrayal of the conditions then prevailing; being an impartial and unprejudiced statement.

4. COINS* OR NUMISMATIC EVIDENCE

The coins are perhaps the most important source of Gupta history. These give a very clear picture of the conditions prevailing in the country. Their study reveals the political unity, the social advancement, the rise of nationalism, the progress of Sanskrit, the economic prosperity of the State and progress made by India in different spheres. It is for the first time in the history of India that we come across coins of a standard quality, artistic beauty and national in character. Unfortunatély, these qualities were lacking in the coins of the earlier kings. Indians perhaps did not know the fine art of making coins prior to their contact with the Greeks from whom they learnt it. Kushans and the Indo-Bactrian monarchs issued on the pattern of the Western coins and mostly were their imitations.

*The nomenclature of the various coins of the Gupta emperors is based on the researches of various scholars in this field, like Dr V. A. Smith, Allan, Dr. A.S. Altekar. The latest researches on this topic carried out in the Department of Archaeology have also been taken into consideration.

The Gupta coins, however, unlike the Kushans and Indo-Bactrian ruler's coins were truly national in character.



While the Kushans and the Indo-Bactrian coins simply showed the portraits of a king on one side and of religious deities, whom they worshipped, on the other, the Gupta coins depicted the artistic achievements of the age and

qualities of the rulers. It will not be an exaggeration to say that these represent the creative urge of the age. Another remarkable point to be noted in this connection is that every ruler either introduced new types of coins or improved the existing ones. This numismatic interest of the rulers is the cause of the coins of this period becoming a class in themselves.

Dr. V.A. Smith, however, feels that the Gupta coins lack originality and are copies of the Roman coins. This criticism is too sweeping to be just. It is an admitted fact that Indians learnt the art of making improved type of coins from the West but to say that they had no originality and blindly copied the Romans and other models is wholly incorrect. We do find at places some similarity between the Gupta coins and those of their Western contemporaries but essentially they depicted Indian dresses, Indian ornaments, Indian gods and goddesses and aspects of Indian day-to-day life. In this respect these were independent in their character from the Roman coins. A critical study will reveal that some of the earlier Gupta coins were partly influenced by the Kushan coins, but with the passage of time improvement in their style and trend towards originality is noted in them and a time came when everything foreign was completely discarded. According to Dr. Altekar the Gupta coins depict Indian life, Indian dress, Indian animals, Indian customs and the weapons of war and were thus surely Indian in their character. He has postulated that the Gupta period was a revolutionary period in the numismatic history of India. Mr. Allan has also put forward the same view. He has criticised Dr. V.A. Smith for calling the Indian coins an imitation of the Romans. He has also found in them an innovation of engraving legends on them.

Coins of Chandra Gupta I

Chandra Gupta I was perhaps the first Gupta monarch who issued his coins. His two predecessors, Sri Gupta and Ghatotkacha, do not seem to have enjoyed independent status and, therefore, did not issue any coins. Some historians have tried to assign a few coins to Ghatotkacha but

the arguments advanced by them in this connection lack conviction.

There are not many varieties in Chandra Gupta's coins which he seems to have issued towards the end of his reign. There is only one type of the coins of his period. It has the portraits of the king and the queen and their names on the obverse and the word 'Lichchhavi' on the reverse together with the goddess and the lion. Chandra Gupta is depicted as wearing the typical Gupta royal dress. He appears to be offering a present to his queen, Kumara Devi, who is wearing a loose robe, the usual ornaments and the tight-fitting head-dress. The depiction of queen on the coin speaks of her importance. The word 'Lichchhavi' on the reverse shows the political influence of that clan over Chandra Gupta I. Some of the writers, like Dr. Jayaswal, feel that the word Lichchhavi was engraved on the coins as it was mainly due to their help that Chandra Gupta had regained his lost position.

Dr. V.A. Smith has remarked that Kumara Devi brought valuable influence to her husband with her marriage contract which, in the course of a few years, secured for him a supreme position in Magadha and the adjoining territories. He has suggested that presumably the Lichchhavis were the rulers of Magadha and this matrimonial alliance secured him this position. Hence, as a token of gratitude, he depicted them in his coins.

Allan differs with the views of Dr. V.A. Smith. He has stated that the pride of Chandra Gupta in his Lichchhavi connection was probably due to the ancient lineage of the Lichchhavis and he did not gain any material advantages by this alliance.

Allan has surmised that these coins were actually issued during the days of Samudra Gupta and were, most probably, commemorative coins. He has tried to support his view by putting forth the argument that Samudra Gupta was a son of Chandra Gupta I from the Lichchhavi princess and as the greatness of the Guptas was due to the Lichchhavis, he issued this type of coins as a memorial to them. Unlike other standard coins of Samudra Gupta this coin is of a more

original type and is distinct from the Kushan coins. Another important point which he has raised is that on the reverse of this coin the goddess seated on a lion has nowhere been adopted by Samudra Gupta in his coins. The surprising thing is that this pattern was followed by the later rulers like Chandra Gupta II and Kumara Gupta and not by Samudra Gupta. Another point put forward by Allan is that there is only one type of coins attributed to the reign of Chandra Gupta I. Had he issued these coins himself during his period there would have been many more types like those of Samudra Gupta and other Gupta rulers. It is not surprising that Chandra Gupta as a ruler did not issue coins. Even a king like Harsha did not issue coins although he was a great king and ruled for a pretty long time.

This type of coins enables us to form an idea of the magnitude of the contribution, material as well as political, made by the clan of the Lichchhavis. If we agree with Dr. Jayaswal's view that with the help of the Lichchhavis Chandra Gupta I besieged Magadha and gained ascendency over that country, we shall have to say that Chandra Gupta would never have been a king but for the help of the Lichchhavis.

Apparently, there seemed to have been a dual control over Magadha by queen Kumara Devi and Chandra Gupta I, like that of William and Mary in England, and the real power might have been acquired by Chandra Gupta some time in 320 A.D. The argument that because Chandra Gupta I issued only one type of coins it was only a 'commemorative medal' is incorrect. The plea can be refuted on the basis of the fact that the earlier days of Chandra Gupta I were the days of turmoil and anarchy and by the time he had strengthened his position over the Magadha and really began to rule, he died. Thus, during this very short period of his rule he perhaps could not issue more than one type of coins and those too he could do only towards the closing years of his reign.

Dr. Altekar writes that departure from the prototype coins might have been due to the insistence of queen Kumara

Devi for the engraving of her portrait and the name of her clan. He accredits her to a great extent for the greatness of Chandra Gupta I. The latter, therefore, could not easily ignore her wishes. The departure from the Kushan type in the depiction of the goddess and the lion is not easy to explain. Some writers are of the opinion that the presence of goddess Durga on a lion in the coins of Chandra Gupta I was perhaps due to the reason that the Lichchhavis were the worshippers of that goddess. It might be that in order to please them and to satisfy their sentiments Chandra Gupta I gave prominence to the goddess in his coins.

The greatest objection to accepting this type as a commemorative medal put forward by Dr. Altekar is that nowhere in the coins there is a mention of Sumudra Gupta, who is presumed to have issued it, as stated by Allan. We find that commemorative medals of the later period invariably bear the name of the king who issued them.

On the obverse the king is shown as presenting something to the queen on the occasion of their marriage. The object thus being presented to the queen is a controversial point. Some writers are of the opinion that it is either a bangle or a ring. Others think that it is neither a bangle nor a ring, but a *Sindhurdani*. It is very difficult at this stage to say exactly what actually is the thing and it remains an undecided issue. Regarding the identity of the goddess, some writers say that she is Durga mounted on a lion, because the Lichchhavis were the worshippers of Durga. According to others she is either goddess Lakshmi or Parvati as the Gupta rulers were the followers of Bhagwatism and Vaishnavism.

In spite of the fact that so much still remains undecided a critical study of the coins is very interesting. Not only it enables us to form an idea about the actual position which the Guptas held prior to their matrimonial alliance with the Lichchhavis but also helps us to bridge certain gaps left in the history of the Guptas constructed from other material like accounts of the contemporary writers and the epigraphic records. The history of Chandra Gupta I would have remained incomplete but for the study of the coins.

Coins of Samudra Gupta

The reign of Samudra Gupta is specially known for the issue of different types of coins. His coins can be classified under the following six heads :—

1. Standard type.
2. Archer type.
3. Battle-axe type.
4. Ashvamedha type.
5. Lyrist type.
6. Tiger-slayer type.

Standard type was the first and perhaps the most popular type of coins, which were issued during the period of Samudra Gupta. These seem to have been an adaptation of the Kushan type and have been found in a large number. The Archer and the Battle-axe types were the two modifications of them. These three different varieties together are known as Military type. We find the king holding a standard, a bow and a battle axe respectively in these three types of coins. In the Ashvamedha type, the fourth in the series, the king is shown performing horse-sacrifice and it tells about his supremacy over other rulers. Lyrist type speaks of his love of music and his mastery over that art. In the Tiger-slayer type, the king is slaying a tiger and this shows his proficiency in the sport of hunting.

The Standard type of coins were probably issued by the normal activity of the mints during his period. The Archer type which shows much originality in it, was probably issued a little later during his reign. The Battle-axe type shows a lot of numismatic experience gained by the native artists. The Ashvamedha and the Lyrist types are artistically of a very high order.

Standard Type : About 211 coins of this type have been discovered so far. They are of different sizes and weights. Dr. Saletore holds that the variation of four to six grains in well-preserved specimens of the same type of Samudra Gupta's coins may be due to variations of the standard in different districts, but probably it means that little effort was made to strike coins accurately according to a particular standard, and were considered as medals rather than as

coins. This also lends support to the remark of Fahien that transactions were carried on by barter and exchange of cowries. However, as is indicated in the epigraphic records, coins were used as medium of exchange for big transactions like the sale and purchase of lands.

In these coins we find the king standing on the left, holding a standard in his left hand and making oblation by the right hand. He is wearing a close-fitting cap, a coat, trousers, ear-rings and necklace. Beneath the arm of the king the word 'Samudra' or Samundra Gupta is written. In front of the king is the Garuda standard. In the reverse side of the coin we find a goddess seated on the throne holding a cornucopia in her left hand and a noose in the right. Dr. V.A. Smith is of the opinion that the object in the left hand of the king is a javeline. Because of this he has called this Standard type as Javeline type. Dr. P.L. Gupta and Dr. B.C. Chhabra are of the opinion that it is neither a standard nor a javeline, but a Rajadanda. So they have called this type as 'Rajadanda type'.

The goddess on these coins is probably Lakshmi, the consort of Vishnu. This type is thoroughly Indian in its character. With a few exceptions, like crescent near the Garuda, which we also come across in some foreign coins, we do not find any other adaptation of foreign coins of that or the earlier period. Some writers hold that the offering which Samudra Gupta is seen to be making at the altar is also analogous to similar scenes of the coins of Kushan kings. Samudra Gupta made some innovations in the coins. He is the first known king in the Indian history who introduced the engraving of a metrical legend on the coins. He was himself a great poet as we are told by Hari Sena. It was therefore but natural for him to do this. The metrical legend has been read as follows :—

"The unconquered one, whose victories extend over a century of battles, having conquered his enemies, wins heaven."* This legend tells us that by his achievements

* Allan's catalogue of the coins of the Gupta Dynasties and of Sasanka, King of Gauda.

he has assured himself not only an immortal name in this world but also a place in the next world.

Archer Type: These have been found in Benaras district and at places like Jaunpur, Bodh Gaya and Bayana. The total number of these coins discovered so far is 13. These seem to be based on the design of Standard type. We find the king with a bow in his left hand and an arrow in his right. The legend in this coin speaks of the king's conquests on this earth, by his personal prowess, as well as that of the heaven by his good deeds. The legend found on this coin is : "After the conquest of the earth, the invincible one wins heaven by good deeds."* It is important to note that a large number of these coins were issued during the days of Chandra Gupta II and it was perhaps the most popular type during his period. We come across majority of these coins in the Eastern provinces of the Empire.

Battle-Axe Type: The coins of this type have been found at Kanauj, Benaras and Bayana. Their total number comes to 23. On the obverse of this type we find the king standing with a battle-axe in his left hand, while on the reverse, the goddess appears to be seated upon a throne. The goddess has been identified as Lakshmi by Dr. A.S. Altekar. She appears to be holding a cornucopia and a noose in her left and right hands respectively. In some of these coins we also find a lotus supplanted on the cornucopia. The idea underlying this coin was perhaps to claim a quasi-divine status for the king. The scene on the obverse was probably the surveying of the battle-field from a vantage point. The legend found on this coin is : "Wielding the battle-axe of Kritanta, the unconquered conqueror of (up to the time) unconquered kings—is victorious". The legend signifies the victory of Samudra Gupta over the rulers who were hitherto unconquered by any ruler. The battle-axe of Samudra Gupta has been compared with Kritanta, the god of Death. As the hand of death is invincible and everyone has to fall a victim to it some day, similarly, the battle-axe of Samudra Gupta was considered to be such that against it no armours or defence could stand. The rulers

*Allan's catalogue of the coins of the Gupta Dynasties and of Sasanka, King of Gauda.

who had remained undefeated till then, had the choice only between destruction or unconditional surrender.

Ashvamedha Type : The Ashvamedha type of coins were probably issued sometime during the latter period of his reign. As we do not find a mention of the horse sacrifice in the Allahabad pillar inscription of Samudra Gupta, we can assume that the Ashvamedha type of coins were issued sometime later after Samudra Gupta had reached the pinnacle of his glorious career. This type is in commemoration of an event of great significance, i.e., horse-sacrifice, which was performed after all the rulers of India had been subdued. Samudra Gupta seems to have taken a particular pride in the revival of this ceremony which had been suspended for a pretty long time. A total of 43 coins of this type have been found between Patna and Saharanpur. These speak of his supremacy over other rulers and place him amongst the foremost rulers of the Hindu period.

On the obverse of this type the sacrificial horse is standing before a decorated 'yupa' on a platform. A pennon seems to be flying over it from the top of the 'yupa'. On the reverse side is the portrait of the crowned queen, presumably Dutta Devi, with a chouri in her right hand and a towel in her left. In front of the queen we find a spear-like object. All this appears to be in accordance with the directions and formalities laid down in the sacred text for observance in connection with the performance of the horse-sacrifice. According to the sacred text if 'yupa' is within a 'vedi' then the ruler performing the sacrifice is to be considered as the conqueror of the world of gods. If the 'yupa' is outside the 'vedi', it represents the conquest of the world. But in case the 'yupa' is partly inside and partly outside the 'vedi', then it indicates the conquest of both this world and the next. The position of the 'yupa' in this coin is the last one. It can therefore be concluded that Samudra Gupta thought himself to be the master of both the worlds—the world of human beings and the world of gods. He had actually conquered India. He was sure that he had won the next world also through his good deeds. The legend on the coin "The king of kings, of irresistible prowess, having pro-

tected the earth, wins heaven"* also signifies this aspect.

The sacred text further says that the queen was supposed to wash and fan the horse. On the coin, however, neither the queen is carrying a pitcher in her hand for this purpose nor any pitcher is there nearby. Presumably, this duty was left to a servant. The presence of a towel in the hand of the queen indicates that she was prepared to dry the body of the horse by the towel after it had been washed. The chouri signifies her duty of fanning the horse when it was being sacrificed with all the religious formalities. It has been further stated that after the horse had been actually killed by the sacrificial spear, the queens had to puncture its body so extensively with the needles that a sword could be passed through its body easily.

Tiger-slayer Type : This type of coins was perhaps issued rarely as the total number of these coins so far discovered is only six. The king is shown as trampling upon a tiger and shooting it by his bow. On the reverse we find the goddess Ganga riding a crocodile, holding a full-blown lotus in her left hand. We do not find anything in her right hand. The king is shown in a very natural, energetic and graceful posture. It represents his strength and courage. These coins became very popular during the days of his successors and we find a large number of similar coins issued by Chandra Gupta II and Kumara Gupta. The historians still disagree about the identity of the object on the reverse.

Lyrist Type : The total number of these coins discovered so far is 19. The king is seated upon a cushioned couch and is playing upon "veena', a musical instrument. On the reverse we find the goddess seated upon a wicker stool with a noose in her right hand and a cornucopia in the left. No king earlier than the Gupta rulers seems to have issued a coin of this type and it would not be incorrect to accredit Samudra Gupta for this innovation. It tells us about his musical accomplishment and his favourite hobby. This coin lends support to his claim in the Allahabad Pillar inscription that he "could excel even Narada and Tumburu

*Allan's catalogue of the coins of the Gupta Dynasties and of Sasanka, King of Gauda.

in his musical accomplishments". There are two variations of this coin. Coins of the first variety are of a better artistic while those of the second variety are thick, small and quality poor in artistic merit.

From the study of the different types of coins issued by Samudra Gupta it can be safely concluded that Samudra Gupta combined in himself the qualities of a warrior, a sportsman, a poet, a scholar and a musician. When not on a battlefield he knew how to pass his time in the company of poets, scholars and musicians. He was the embodiment of various qualities and, unlike other great warriors of his age, he had a better sense of spending his leisure hours. His coins go to show that he possessed an exceptional personality. This has been confirmed by contemporary records.

Coins of Chandra Gupta II

The period of Chandra Gupta II was another glorious period in the numismatic history of India. He discarded many types of coins prevalent during the period of his father and introduced new types. Ashvamedha type was discarded. Dr. A.S. Altekar writes that he stopped horse-sacrifice, not because he could not afford to do so or was not strong enough but because of his conviction in Vaishnavism. We also do not find any Battle-Axe or Lyrist type of coins belonging to his reign. He replaced the latter type by Couch type. He issued Standard type of coins which were popular during the days of his father, but in his reign they were issued only for a very short period. Contrary to this, Archer type coins which were issued in a very limited number by Samudra Gupta became very popular during the days of Chandra Gupta II. We come across much variety in them. Couch type and Chakra Vikrama type, the two innovations of Chandra Gupta II, do not seem to have become very popular during his days.

Chandra Gupta's coins can be classified under the following heads :

1. Archer type.
2. Standard type.

3. Couch type.
4. Chakra Vikrama type.
5. Horseman type.
6. Lion-slayer type.
7. Chhatra or Umbrella type.

1. *Archer Type :* This was perhaps the most popular of the various types of coins issued during the period of Chandra Gupta II. The total number of these coins discovered so far is 936. These coins were also very popular during the days of his successors as they have been found all over the Gupta empire. The ruler is shown standing with a bow in his left hand and an arrow in his right. On the reverse goddess Lakshmi and apparently a lotus have been depicted. There are many varieties of this type. They all testify to the king's preference for the bows and arrows over other weapons of war.

2. *Standard Type :* There is only one coin of this type found so far. It is surprising to note that this type which was very popular during the period of Samudra Gupta was completely discarded by Chandra Gupta II. Some of the writers think that this coin was completely discarded by Chandra Gupta II and the only exception found might have been issued by one of his feudatory chiefs.

3. *Couch Type :* This is a rare type as the total number of coins found so far is only 7. On the obverse the king is seen seated upon a couch holding a flower in his right hand while his left is resting on the couch. On the reverse we find the goddess seated on the throne.

Another variety of this coin has been found wherein the king and the queen are seated on a couch. So far we have come across only a single specimen of this type. It seems to be a scene of some summer afternoon. The king and his queen seem to be spending a few leisure hours out of their busy life.

4. *Chakra Vikrama Type:* A single coin of this type was found in Bayana hoard. God Chakra Purusha is shown giving some gift to the ruler in this coin and the king is

shown receiving that. This coin testifies to the direct con-course of the king with the Almighty. This hints indirectly at the theory of the Divine Right of Kings. It also indicates the king's inclination towards Vaishnavism.

5. *Horseman Type:* Chandra Gupta II was perhaps the first Gupta king who issued this type of coins. Unlike his father, who was very fond of musical accomplishment, Chandra Gupta seems to have an inclination for horseman-ship. The total number of these coins so far found at Mirzapur, Jaunpur, Ayodhya and Bayana is 144. The king is shown riding a horse carrying a sword or a bow. Accord-ing to Dr. V.A. Smith it is neither a sword nor a bow but a lance. In some of the coins the king does not carry any-thing. On the reverse, except in a single case, we find the goddess seated on a wicker stool holding a noose in her right hand and a lotus in the left.

6. *Lion-slayer Type :* The total number of these coins found so far is 85. These have been found at Jaunpur, Kanauj and Bayana and are of a very high artistic merit. On their obverse we find the king attacking a lion with a bow and arrow. In its various varieties we find the king attacking the lion with a sword or trampling it or the lion in a retreating position. According to Dr. V.A. Smith the Lion-slayer type coins can thus be divided into three categories :—

(*i*) Lion combatant type.

(*ii*) Lion trampler type.

(*iii*) Lion retreating type.

On the reverse of these coins we find the goddess seat-ed on the lion. Some of the writers hold that the goddess is Durga. But due to the presence of the lotus some writers identify her as Lakshmi. The legend on this coin has been read as follows : "The moon among kings, brave as a lion, whose fame is far-spread, invincible on earth, conquers heaven."*

*Allan's catalogue of the coins of the Gupta Dynasties and of Sasanka, King of Gauda.

7. *Chhatra or Umbrella Type:* In this type of coins there are two varieties. Seventy-seven coins of this type have so far been discovered. The king is seen making oblations. Behind him is shown an attendant holding a chhatra over the king's head. Some writers feel that the attendant is a lady, but others have tried to prove that he is a male attendant. On the reverse we find Lakshmi with a noose in her right hand and a lotus in the left. Allan is of the opinion that the Chhatra type of coins can be divided in two classes on the basis of the legend. In the first class we find the legend in prose while in the second it is in verse.

It is very difficult to determine the time of the issue of these coins. Historians have, however, tried to put Archer, Standard and Couch types among the coins issued during the earlier part of his reign. Chakra Vikrama type seems to have been issued a little later. Horseman type, being very popular during his period, seems to have been issued throughout his reign. Besides these, some silver and copper coins belonging to the period of Chandra Gupta II have also been found. It is, however, as yet very difficult to establish that these were issued by Chandra Gupta II himself. These might have been issued by some feudatory chiefs of Chandra Gupta II in their respective regions where these have been discovered.

Dr. V. A. Smith has divided the copper coins of Chandra Gupta II into the following categories :

'*Umbrella Type*' : In this type the king is leaning to the left with his right hand raised on his right side and an attendant is holding an Umbrella over his head.

'*Standing King*' *Type* : In this the king is standing with his left arm raised and the right arm lowered.

'*Chandra Head*' *Type* : Only the bust of the king of his youthful days appears in this coin.

'*Vase*' *Type* : In this coin the king appears with a crescent above.

The political unity, peace and prosperity were the stimulating factors for the socio-cultural developments. There

was no problem on the well-protected borders of empire. The king had enough time to think and implement different reforms; the reform or the improvement of currency being one of these. Thus, we find that the best specimens of the coins of Hindu Period were issued during this period.

The study of these coins provides a thorough insight into the life prevailing during the days of Chandra Gupta II. The conclusions arrived at on the basis of these coins have been confirmed by the writings of foreign travellers like Fahien and the epigraphic evidences and records of the later historians.

COINS OF KUMARA GUPTA I

Kumara Gupta surpassed his father and grandfather in his numismatic activities. He patronised the mint masters. In order to win his favour they were busy day and night in devoting their skill to the designing of several new types of gold and silver coins with numerous varieties. It would not be incorrect to say that the coins of Kumara Gupta were the blend of different types of coins of his predecessors. He also innovated many new types. His coins can be classified mainly under the following heads :—

(1) Archer type.
(2) Horseman type.
(3) Swordsman type.
(4) Lion-slayer type.
(5) Tiger-slayer type.
(6) Elephant-rider type.
(7) Elephant-rider-Lion-slayer type.
(8) Rhinoceros-slayer type.
(9) Ashvamedha type.
(10) Kartikeya type.
(11) Chhatra type.
(12) Apratigha type.
(13) Lyrist type.

Besides the above, he introduced several other types of coins wherein he is shown in the field of war and sport. He also issued many silver coins and from their study it is obvious that he had some creative instinct in him. About half a dozen of his copper coins have also been found. It seems that like Mohammad Tuglak he also experimented with the copper coins and was more successful in this respect than the former.

From the account of Fahien we find that barter system was also prevalent in the country and the cowries were used as one of the mediums of transaction. As to the variety and the originality of his coins it would not be an exaggeration to say that he surpassed both his predecessors. In some of his coins the artistic standards are certainly better than his predecessors. However, in some of his coins like the Archer and the Lion-slayer types, there is a deterioration in the skill as well as the standard. Let us now study each type of his coins.

1. *Archer Type:* The Archer variety of Kumara Gupta is not of such a high standard as his coins of some other categories. These lack artistic qualities, although Mr. R.D. Banerjee does not agree with this remark and is of the opinion that the coins of this type were a class by themselves. In this type the king is standing with a bow in his left hand and an arrow in his right. On the reverse we find the goddess seated on a lotus. Dr. Altekar has classified these coins in four categories to maintain distinction among them. The legend on this coin has been read as follows: "Kumara Gupta, lord of the world, having conquered the earth, wins heaven."*

2. *Horseman Type:* We find many varieties of this type. The king is shown on the back of a horse with different types of weapons in his hands. It was probably the most popular type among the coins issued during his period as we are in possession of a large number of them. On the reverse of some of these coins we find the goddess often sitting on a wicker stool. In some coins we find her feeding

*Allan's catalogue of the coins of the Gupta Dynasties and of Saaanka, King of Gauda.

the pigeons. These coins can be classified into two categories and each category further into many varieties. These coins indicate the fondness of the king for horse-riding which seems to be more in the footsteps of his father.

3. *Swordsman Type :* These coins indicate the high artistic order of that time. These have been found at many places. Their total number is 16. In these coins the king is offering incense at the altar before him. His left hand is on the hilt of a sword. On the reverse goddess Lakshmi is seated on a lotus, holding a noose in her right hand and a long stalk in her left. These coins acquaint us with the ruler's love for the sword and his proficiency in swordmanship and other military exercises. The legend on this coin has been read as follows :— "Kumara Gupta having conquered the earth, wins heaven by good deeds."*

4. *Lion-slayer Type :* We do not find anything new in these coins as these were also issued by Samudra Gupta as well as Chandra Gupta II. These coins stand no comparison with the coins of his predecessors as they are neither artistically so beautiful nor have they different varieties like similar coins introduced during the period of his predecessors. There are only two varieties in these coins. In the first one we find the ruler fighting the lion while in the second we find him trampling on a lion. The legend may be interpreted as follows :—

"Kumara Gupta—unconquered Mahindra being (already) the Lord of Earth wins Heaven."

From this legend we gather that Kumara Gupta, in spite of the fact that he had to fight many foreign invaders and suppress many internal revolts, always emerged successful. He was thus known as the lord of the earth. The next two words "wins heaven" sum up the benign activities of the ruler which won for him a place in the next world.

5. *Tiger-slayer Type :* This type was partly on the lines of the Tiger-slayer type of Samudra Gupta and partly influenced by Kumara Gupta's own Horseman-type coins.

*Allan's catalogue of the coins of the Gupta Dynasties.

Here we find the king shooting a tiger. Legend noted on this coin is "The glorious (king) whose strength and valour is like that of a tiger." From this type we can form an idea of the personal strength of the king. From the figure of the king it appears that he was not at all nervous even when facing a tiger or, as is implied, fighting an invader. It testifies to the king being an energetic and a determined person. On the reverse we find the goddess feeding her pet.

6. *Elephant-rider Typa:* This was introduced by Kumara Gupta for the first time in the Gupta history. Neither Samudra Gupta nor Chandra Gupta II issued any coin of this type. It represents the mastery which the Indians had attained in the art of numismatic activities. We are told that the best artists were summoned by the king for preparing special dies for coins of this variety. The king is seen driving the elephant and behind him is sitting a bearer with an umbrella. The elephant seems to be in a pose of attacking his prey and is thus very furious. This obviously throws light on the spirit of sportsmanship of the king. On the reverse of this coin we find goddess Lakshmi. The lines of the legend on the coin run as follows :—

"Kumara Gupta who has destroyed his enemies and protects (feudatory) king is victorious over his foes."

From this legend we gather that Kumara Gupta did not have a peaceful time. He had to fight many of his enemies whom he destroyed in the battle-field. The last words indicate that he won victories over his enemies and had never been defeated.

7. *Elephant-rider-Lion-slayer Type:* This type is different from that of the elephant-rider type. Here we find a lion being attacked both by the ruler and the elephant. The king, who is sitting on the elephant, is shown furiously advancing with a dagger in his hand to attack the lion. The pose shows that the lion may be trampled over by the elephant before the king could actually attack him. On the reverse we find a goddess holding some object in her hand which cannot easily be distinguished and a peacock

at some distance looking up towards her. The object may be something for feeding the peacock.

8. *Rhinoceros-slayer Type :* This type of coins has been found only at Bayana. It gives us an indication of the sportsman spirit of the king. He is seen on the back of a horse with a sword in his hand attacking an animal. On the reverse we find the goddess on a crocodile, with a lotus in her hand. A female attendant is standing behind her and is holding a parasol over the head of the goddess. Legend can be translated as follows:—"Lord Kumara Gupta is always victorious and is protector by means of a sword from the rhinoceros."

9. *Ashvamedha Type :* From the study of these coins it appears that Kumara Gupta like his predecessors performed horse-sacrifice. Except for these coins, we have no other source to confirm this view and the contemporary sources are silent about this. A few of these coins have been discovered in different parts of India. They are of a very inferior quality. These indicate that he was Samrat of his time and India was united and was enjoying a strong Government which ensured peace and security to the country.

10. *Kartikeya Type :* This was more or less a religious type and was issued to signify the special respect which the king had for this deity. Mention of this type of coins has also been made by Dr. Smith and Cunningham in their records who call it "Peacock" type coins. The king is seen feeding the peacocks. On the reverse the goddess is sitting on a peacock. The king is holding a spear in his left hand and seems to be scattering something by his right hand before an object which is not very clear. The legend is as follows :

"Victorious by his own merit is Mahendra Kumara."

This legend indicates that the king was more proud of his personal prowess than on the fortune he had inherited.

11. *Chhatra Type :* Only two coins of this type have been discovered so far. The legend inscribed on these states that the king is the ruler of the world. There is nothing new

in this type. It seems to be modelled on the lines of the coins issued by his predecessors. On the obverse of the coins the king is making oblations while an attendant with a Chhatra in his hand is standing behind him. Some writers have expressed the view that the person carrying the chhatra is not a man but a woman, because of the dress worn by her.

12. *Apratigha Type :* This is also known as "a king and two queens type". There appears to be a figure of the king and two queens on this. Some writers, after a very minute study of this type, have come to the conclusion that there is only one female. About the story behind the issue of this type, the writers hold divergent views. Some feel that the king is probably renouncing the world and the queen and the crown prince are standing by his side. In all probability there was some calamity in the country and the king was told that his renouncement might help to avoid it.

13. *Lyrist Type :* Samudra Gupta was the first of the Gupta rulers to issue this coin. Chandra Gupta II perhaps had no great love for music. Therefore we do not find any such coin belonging to his period. We again come across this type during the reign of Kumara Gupta I. The king is shown playing on a musical instrument while the queen is sitting on a cushion by his side and is smelling a flower. There is another type of coin which is not much different from this. In this the king is offering a bunch of flowers to the queen.

Besides the above, some silver and copper coins of the period of Kumara Gupta have been found in different parts of the country. These seem to have been issued in a very small number. Most probably these were issued to help petty bargains. These coins have been found in the western regions of India and were probably used in exchange for the commodities which were imported by the traders. Dr. V.A. Smith has classified these according to their different titles. Allan has, however, classified them according to their size and their artistic qualities and workmanship. A large number of copper coins have been discovered in Gujarat

Kathiawar which indicates that the Gupta rule extended to this part of India in the west. Some writers feel that the silver and the copper coins, in all probability, were issued during the later years of Kumara Gupta I. The continuous attacks of the Huns adversely affected the economic conditions of the country thereby depleting gold reserves. Thus these coins indirectly tell about the economic bankruptcy of the Government.

From the foregoing it is evident that the coins of Kumara Gupta I are a valuable source of history of his period. Not only these help us to know about the efficiency of the administration but also make us acquainted with the political, social, economic and religious conditions of the time. The legend inscribed on some of the coins tells about the victories of the king over his opponents. The various gods and goddesses portrayed on these make us acquainted with the religious views held by the kings. The silver and the copper coins testify to the agricultural and economic conditions, the foreign invasions and the internal turmoil through which the country had to pass.

Coins of Skanda Gupta

Dr. Altekar is of the opinion that with the death of Kumara Gupta I, the government's zeal and love for the numismatic activities came to an end. The history of Skanda Gupta is nothing but a record of his desperate struggle against the foreign aggressions and the internal rebellions. The history of India after Skanda Gupta becomes still more uncertain. India was parcelled out into many small states which were always at war with one another. India again experienced another period of anarchy and disorder. The rulers were too much absorbed in their struggles against the disrupting forces to re-establish a strong internal government and find time to think about issuing different varieties of coins.

The coins of the successors of Kumara Gupta I were not of the same quality. The rulers had no artistic taste. A minute study of the coins of Skanda Gupta and his

successors reveals that these were debased coins and contained a larger proportion of alloy as compared to the earlier coins. Not only the solidarity of the empire was gone due to the foreign invaders but the economic conditions also became worse. It has therefore been concluded that there was much financial strain on the resources of the empire with the result that the coins deteriorated in quality and the purity could not be maintained. The study of the later coins gives us only a list of the rulers than their qualities. The coins of Skanda Gupta can be classified into the following four types :

1. Archer type.
2. King and Lakshmi type.
3. Chhatra type.
4. Horseman type.

1. *Archer Type :* As compared to the coins of this type of his predecessors we do not find any variety in it. The king is seen in coat and trousers unlike his predecessors (who wore dhoti) with a bow in his left hand and the arrow in his right. The word Skanda can be seen written under his left arm. On the reverse goddess Lakshmi is seated facing a lotus flower. The study of this coin indicates the war-like activities of the king. The coat and trousers seem to be copied from the Kushans and other foreign rulers. This indirectly hints at the military activities in which the king was to participate. From the appearance of Lakshmi on the reverse we come to know that the king was a worshipper of Vishnu.

2. *King and Lakshmi Type :* Allan has called this type as King and Lakshmi type. In this Lakshmi is shown with a halo in many coins. We do not find the goddess represented as she ought to have been. Allan has tried to prove his viewpoint by the argument that the queen, as is usual, should have been on the left side of the king but in this coin the lady is shown on the right and she is taller than him. Thus she cannot be a queen but is someone superior to the king. Another point favouring this view is that she is making a present to the king. From the bow and arrow which

are also shown in this coin we can deduce that it depicted a battle-scene in which the king implored success over his enemies. He therefore prayed to the goddess and the goddess is bestowing upon him a pledge for victory in the form of a present. Dr. V.A. Smith is, however, of the opinion that the lady of this coin is not a goddess but a queen and this coin was issued on the lines of the earliest coin of this dynasty which was issued by Chandra Gupta I wherein he was presenting a ring to his queen. He justifies his view by saying that the king does not appear to be in a pose of humility which he ought to assume in the presence of a goddess. The theory of Dr. Smith has been supported by many other historians and they have renamed this coin as the King and Queen type. Dr. Altekar, however, agrees with what has been put forward by Allan and thinks that the coin should be called as King and Lakshmi type pending final decision which may be possible when further evidence is forthcoming.

3. *Chhatra type :* But for a single coin of this type which has been discovered from Bayana hoard we do not have any other evidence of the existence of this type. Some writers are of the opinion that it might have been issued either by Vikramaditya or Ghatotkacha. The king in this coin is offering a sacrifice and an attendant behind him is holding an umbrella.

4. *Horseman type :* A single coin of this type has been discovered from Bodleian Collection. Its discovery made the writers add one more type of coins to the credit of Skanda Gupta. Dr. V.A. Smith, however, does not agree with Allan and Dr. Altekar in this respect and thinks that it was in fact a coin of Chandra Gupta II and has been wrongly attributed to Skanda Gupta who had no love for the numismatic art.

Besides the above four types of coins of Skanda Gupta we come across many silver and copper coins of his period which have been discovered in different parts of India. These coins tell us about his religious belief as well as his personal prowess.



COINS OF LATER GUPTAS

Puru Gupta : We have not got any coins of this king so far but from the study of some seals we gather the impression that there was a king by the name of Puru Gupta. An Archer type of gold coin has been attributed to him by Allan but Dr. Altekar has proved beyond doubt that it was a coin of Budha Gupta.

Ghatotkacha Gupta : A coin which has been found in Leningrad museum, on which the word 'Ghato' is engraved, made Dr. Bloch to opine that it was a coin issued by Ghatotkacha Gupta, the father of Chandra Gupta I. Other historians, however, do not agree with this. They are certain that no coin was issued by the Gupta rulers before Chandra Gupta I. Another factor which should be kept in mind is that according to the Allahabad Pillar Inscription, Ghatotkacha was a Maharaja and did not enjoy an independent status. There was, therefore, no question of his issuing a coin in his name. On the basis of some similarities of this coin with the coins of Kumar Gupta II, Allan has suggested that it might be a coin of Kumara Gupta II. Some other writers associate issue of this coin with Ghatotkacha of Malava, a contemporary of Skanda Gupta. Most probably, he assumed his independence after the death of Skanda Gupta.

Narasimha Gupta : There is only one type of coin of this ruler which is known as Archer type. There is too much of alloy, perhaps 54%, in this coin and it shows the economic bankruptcy of the Government. It appears that during the period of Narasimha Gupta, India was passing through very troubled times and the ruler was compelled to issue this inferior coin.

Kumara Gupta II : On the basis of an Archer type coin of this ruler we come to know that he ruled for a pretty long time and was succeeded by his son Vishnu Gupta. Like the coin of Narasimha Gupta his coin is also not of a pure metal and there is 46% of alloy in it. There is, however, another variety which is somewhat better. It con-

tains only 29% alloy. The king is seen standing with a bow in his left hand and arrows in his right. On the reverse we find goddess Lakshmi. This coin shows that the Vaishnavism was still popular among the Gupta rulers and they had not embraced Buddhism so far.

Budha Gupta : He was perhaps the greatest among the successors of Skanda Gupta. He ruled over the country for about 20 years from 475 to 495 A.D. Besides his coins many other contemporary records are available to reconstruct his history. He apparently did not develop any interest in the issue of coins. Thus we come across only a single type of coins of his period. Even in this type we do not get many varieties. His lack of interest in the issue of coins can be concluded from the fact that unlike Chandra Gupta II and Kumara Gupta I, he has throughout been shown on the left, holding a bow, and with his name inscribed below his left arm. He is holding some arrows in his right hand. On the reverse goddess Lakshmi is sitting on a lotus, holding a noose in her right hand and a lotus in her left. It is interesting to note that Budha Gupta still had his faith in Vaishnavism. Some other evidence also proves that he had had no inclinations towards Buddhism. He seems to have lost his grip over the Western regions. However, he was respected all over India. This is evident from the location of his coins in the Western regions the chiefs of which regarded him as a supreme ruler.

Vishnu Gupta : Only Archer type of coins of this ruler have been found from the Kalighat hoard so far. He seems to have ruled somewhere in Eastern India and we find a large quantity of alloy i.e. 57%, in his coins. This speaks of deterioration in the economic conditions of the state.

Besides the above, we come across a few gold coins of Vainya Gupta and Prakasaditya. From their study it can be concluded that the Gupta rule went on up to the sixth century A.D. In his coins, Prakasaditya is shown attacking a lion from a horseback. His coins have been found at

places like Rampur, Shahjahanpur, Hardoi and Bharsar. Some writers feel that in fact these are the coins of Puru Gupta who had taken up the title of Prakasaditya.

From the study of the above we conclude that the Gupta coins play a very important role as a source of the history of the Imperial Guptas. But for these coins we would have been in the dark about many aspects of the Gupta rulers. These coins acquaint us with their religion, their relations with contemporary rulers and their dealings with the feudatory chiefs. At places these coins supplement information gathered from other sources. They also confirm the views and the conclusions arrived at on the basis of literary sources or epigraphic evidences. Sometimes they are the solitary proofs and perhaps the only source of historical information.

5. INSCRIPTIONS* OR NUMISMATIC EVIDENCE

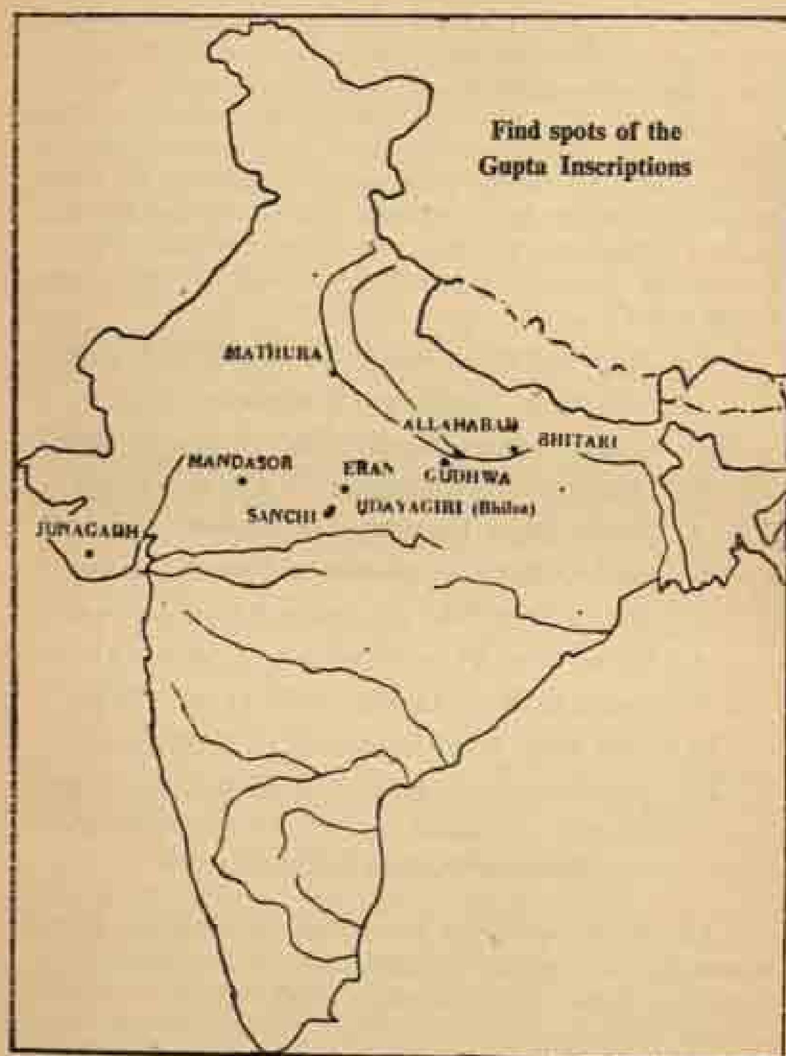
The inscriptions are an equally important source of history of the Imperial Guptas. These can be classified under the following heads :—

1. Commemorative Inscriptions;
2. Dedicatory Inscriptions; and
3. Donative Inscriptions.

Each one of these types of inscriptions has its own importance. The first type gives us details of the dynasty, the names of the ancestors, long list of wars and personal qualities of kings. The second tells us about the religion of the State. The third furnishes details of economic conditions of that period. When viewed together, these inscriptions enable us to form a definite opinion about the political, social, economic and religious conditions of the country in those days. We come across several of such inscriptions belong-

*The text of the inscriptions is the re-production of that given by Dr. Fleet, with the kind permission of the Department of Archaeology, Government of India.

ing to Samudra Gupta, Chandra Gupta II, Kumara Gupta, Skanda Gupta and Budha Gupta. The inscriptions of Samudra Gupta, Chandra Gupta II and Skanda Gupta



require an elaborate examination as these are veritable mines of historical information. Relatively speaking, the

inscriptions of other rulers are not so important. In reality these were got engraved by some of their chiefs and kings themselves do not seem to have taken much interest in them. These inscriptions are found engraved on pillars, rocks, stones and on the walls of caves. A majority of these are written in Sanskrit, which perhaps then enjoyed the status of the national language. These are in prose as well as in verse form. The information which can be gleaned from these requires a critical examination, as in some respects it is incompatible with the information available from other sources. Some of the inscriptions which have been brought to light through the efforts of General Cunningham, James Prinsep and the Department of Archaeology may be discussed as under:

1. Allahabad Pillar Inscription of Samudra Gupta.
2. Eran Stone Inscription of Samudra Gupta.
3. Udayagiri Cave Inscription of Chandra Gupta II.
4. Mathura Stone Inscription of Chandra Gupta II.
5. Sanchi Stone Inscription of Chandra Gupta II.
6. Gadhwa Stone Inscription of Chandra Gupta II.
7. Bhilsad Stone Pillar Inscription of Kumara Gupta I.
8. Bhitari Stone Pillar Inscription of Skanda Gupta.
9. Junagadh Rock Inscription of Skanda Gupta.
10. Eran Stone Pillar Inscription of Budha Gupta.
11. Mandasor Stone Inscription of Kumara Gupta.

Allahabad Pillar Inscription

The Allahabad Pillar Inscription of Samudra Gupta throws light on the manifold personality of the great ruler as a warrior, a poet, a scholar and a statesman. It is undated. On the basis of its 29th line which has been translated as under, Dr. Fleet opines that it was a posthumous inscription. "The lofty column (is) as it were an arm of the earth, proclaiming the fame which having pervaded the entire surface of the earth with (its) development that was caused by

(his) conquest of the whole world, (has departed) hence (and now) experiences the sweet happiness attained by (his) having gone to the abode of (Indra), the lord of the gods of the Maharajadhiraja, the glorious Samudra Gupta". But this does not seem to be correct as the Ashvamedha (Horse-Sacrifice) which was performed by Samudra Gupta after his victories in the North and the South is nowhere mentioned in this inscription.

The pillar was originally erected by Asoka and his inscription on it contains some instructions issued by him to the Governor of Kausambi. It was originally situated at Kausambi. Samudra Gupta fought the first decisive battle of his career against the three Naga rulers at Kausambi. This battle brought Samudra Gupta into the limelight of the Indian politics and paved the way to his future greatness which he enjoyed by dint of his valour. Kausambi also enjoyed an important position partly due to its good situation (founded at the junction of three rivers) and partly as a centre of trade. The pillar was removed later on to its present place by Akbar. This act of the Great Mughal was in consonance with similar acts of Feroze Tughlaq and some other Muslim rulers who also removed ancient pillars from their original places to Delhi and other places of importance for purposes of exhibition. The fact that the inscription was not originally at its present place can also be proved from the fact that Fahien does not make any mention of this inscription in his description of Allahabad. It would be more appropriate to name the inscription as 'Kausambi Inscription', as Kausambi and not Allahabad was a place of historic importance during the days of Samudra Gupta.

The inscription brings out the strange contrast between the ideologies of the two great rulers—Asoka and Samudra Gupta. In the theory of kingship, the two rulers stand diametrically opposite to each other. While Asoka spoke in terms of peace and non-violence, Samudra Gupta upheld the principles of war and aggression. He was very proud of his victories, and seemed to have a passion for fresh con-

quests. Unlike Asoka he believed that sword and not non-violence could keep the country in a prosperous and peaceful condition. This is particularly illustrated by his policy of extermination which he followed in rooting out his opponents in Aryavarta.

From line 31 we gather that this inscription was composed by Harisena, who was also the Minister of Peace and War of Samudra Gupta. As he accompanied the emperor in all his wars and was an eye-witness of all his achievements, the details of this inscription should be considered as authentic. Unfortunately, Harisena has laid more stress on the language of the inscription than on the details of the historical events. He seems to be more concerned with the description of the glories of his master and has even exaggerated it at certain places, than to write an inscription for the information of the coming generations.

The description of wars has been given only in lines 13, 19, 21, 22 and 23 of this long inscription of 33 lines. The details of these battles could have been given more space by the court-historian had he so desired and then we would not have to base some facts on presumption and grope in the dark for the others. Another complication created by the writer of this inscription is that he has nowhere mentioned the horse-sacrifice, the performance of which has been proved beyond doubt by the discovery of 'Ashvamedha coins' of Samudra Gupta. This point would not have been so significant if in the 29th line of the inscription the statement about "departure of Samudra Gupta to the abode of Indra" had not occurred. In fact, it can be said that Harisena impresses us more as a poet and a scholar than as a historian. Of course, it will be admitted, as Dr. Altekar has pointed out, that had he described the events like a historian, the panegyric probably would not have been a prose-poem as it undoubtedly is now.

The inscription is partly in verse and partly in prose and is couched in a very polished Sanskrit language. It is non-sectarian in character as the whole of this inscription is devoted to the recital of the glories and conquests of

Samudra Gupta. Some writers are of the opinion that actually it was engraved during the period of Chandra Gupta II soon after the latter's accession to the throne. This view has been supported by a mention of Chandra Gupta II in line 33 which could not have been possible during the life time of Samudra Gupta, there being a large number of other princes and relatives of equal status who would have resented this exceptional privilege being given to Prince Chandra Gupta II. It can also be said that this inscription, being a posthumous one, was presumably got engraved by Chandra Gupta, who, himself being a great warrior, felt elated in getting the victories of his father inscribed as a permanent record for the coming generations.

The text and translation of the inscription is as below :—

Text :

5. Yasya prajñ-ânushaṅg-ôchita-sukha-manasaḥ sâstra-ṭattv-ârtha-bharttuḥ (— —)
stabdh-ô (— — —)ni(— — —)n-ôchchhṛi(— —)

[sa] t-kâvya-śri-virôdhân=budha-guṇita-guṇ-âjñ-âhatân=êva kritvâ v[i]dval-lôkê vi[— —]sphuṭa-bahu-kavitâ-kîrtti-râjyam bhunakti [||*] 3

Translation :

"Whose happy mental disposition was always to mix-up with the learned people and to remain the supporter of the real truth of scriptures, firmly fixed (in the tenets). Having overcome those destructive forces, which mar the beauty of excellent poetry, by the aegis and inspiration imbibed from the collective wisdom of his erudite men, he still shines as a luminary of meridian splendour in the firmament of the wise by much of poetry (of excellence) and of clear meaning."

In this line and in the earlier lines which are unfortunately in a very dilapidated condition, we gather some

information about the early education and the suitability of Samudra Gupta for the exalted position of a king. The first two lines are completely gone but these convey the impression that he successfully fought some battles during the lifetime of his father. Presumably, this was one of the main considerations for his selection as successor to the throne although there were many other princes of equal status and perhaps with a better claim. From the fifth line we gather that he was a very learned man and had a deep knowledge of the shastras. It is also told that Samudra Gupta ruled the country in accordance with the instructions for a ruler contained in the shastras. He did not like to deviate even slightly from those and faithfully followed the Hindu ideal of imperialism according to which Ceylon, the East Indies and even Afghanistan also formed part of the Indian empire. In accordance with these tenets Samudra Gupta established his government over the whole of Northern India and compelled the rulers of Ceylon, East Indies and Afghanistan to pay homage to him and to acknowledge him as their supreme lord. He did not go beyond the limits of Afghanistan although he could conquer Persia whose ruler had been greatly weakened by the Roman aggressions. The history of Samudra Gupta shows that his actions were regulated by the Hindu law. He did not give up his principles even after victories.

He was very keen to enjoy the company of the learned people. With the restoration of peace he turned his attention to the development of literary activities. It was due to this reason that he enjoyed a very high position in the literary circles and was a patron of poets and scholars of his age. This encouragement and his preferential treatment for the learned attracted scholars from all over India to the Imperial court.

Samudra Gupta was a true follower of Hinduism. He followed scriptures in the real sense. His struggles in Northern India against the foreign rulers were inspired by Dharma. He thus followed a policy of total extermination of foreign element from Aryavarta.

Text :

7. [Ā] ryyō h=ity=upaguhya bhāva-piśunair=utkarṇitai rōmabhih sabhyēsh=ūchchhuvasitēshu tulyakulaja-mlānânan-ōdvīkshi [ta]ḥ

sn[ē]ha-vyālulitēna bāshpa-guruṇā tattv-ēkshinā chakshushā yaḥ pitr=ābhihitō ni[r]īksh[y]a nikhi[lant pāhy=ēva]m=[u]rv[v]im=iti [||*] 4

Translation :

"Who being scanned at, with looks of gloom and envy by those rejected despite their equal birth, while the attendants of the court heaved deep sighs of relief manifesting their happiness was selected by his father who exclaimed 'Verily he is worthy'. He embraced him with hair standing erect, symptomatic of his happiness and sentiments. He looked at him repeatedly in affection with tears of joy, which expressed his noble nature and happiness at the right selection. He is to govern, of a certainty, the whole world."

In this line Harisena has drawn a vivid scene of the royal court when Chandra Gupta I selected Samudra Gupta from among his children as his successor. The rival princes through jealousy and sheer disappointment (they having been rejected in spite of their equal rights by way of birth, right and status) looked very gloomy. The courtiers, however, were very happy and fully satisfied at this selection as they had seen Samudra Gupta's mettle in the battlefield and expected better and more prosperous days for the Gupta dynasty under his able guidance. Even Chandra Gupta I rightly and justifiably exclaimed "Verily, he is worthy", worthy to win the old king's confidence and worthy to handle the critical situation which had been created by the enemies of the empire.

In the last part of this line Harisena has drawn a picture of the noble qualities of Chandra Gupta I as well as the great affection which he had for his heir-apparent. Tears of joy rolled down his eyes when he embraced Samudra

Gupta and his hair stood erect symptomatic of his happiness and sentiments. He was also happy as his selection was approved by his courtiers. He was satisfied that he had given over a 'trust' in the right hands.

Dr. Jayaswal is of the opinion that the selection of Samudra Gupta was made by his father at a time when he himself was a refugee and was dying, either of wounds inflicted on him in some battle or through sheer disappointment caused by his expulsion from Patliputra and his repeated failures to retrieve the situation. In his letter, wherein he nominated Samudra Gupta as his successor, he wrote, "You, now, my noble Sir, be the king (protect the kingdom)". From this verse we gather that Samudra Gupta was not the eldest son of Chandra Gupta and his selection was made with the approval of the Council of Ministers. He was probably found to be the fittest for kingship among his children.

Some of the writers suggest that there was a civil war and it was after defeating his brothers that Samudra Gupta ascended the throne. Some have tried to identify 'Kaca' as an elder brother of Samudra Gupta. According to them he disputed the succession of Samudra Gupta. There was a civil war. However, nothing more is heard of Kaca after the accession of Samudra Gupta.

Mr. R.D. Banerji has stated that the Magadha empire had gone to the background after a defeat of the first Gupta ruler at the hands of Chandravarman of Pushkarna and that Samudra Gupta retrieved the position. This view, however, does not seem to be correct. On the basis of a play named 'Kaumudi-Mahotsava', Dr. Jayaswal has concluded that Chandra Gupta 1 was in fact Chanda Sena and had been ousted by the Vakataka empire. But Dr. Altekar agrees neither with Mr. R.D. Banerji nor with Dr. Jayaswal and writes that the exit of the Guptas from the politics of India for some time does not appear to be correct. It is very probable that there was a struggle for succession after the death of Chandra Gupta I and this may have resulted in some disturbance which was put down by Samudra Gupta speedily.

Text :

9. [Dṛi]shṭvā karmmāṇy=anēkāny-amanuja-sadṛisāny =adbhut-ōdbhinna-harshā bh[ā*]vair=āsvādaya [— — — — — — —] [kē]chit

Vīryy-ōttaptās-cha kēchich=chharaṇam-upagatā yasya vrittē praṇāmē=py=art[t] ē (?) [— — —] 5

Translation :

"Some people, when they witnessed many of his actions which were nothing short of an immortal nature, displayed their affection and over-whelming jubilation, while others who sought his protection after subjugation, paid homage, rightly due."

A critical study of this line reveals two important points. First that Samudra Gupta in his warlike qualities was much above a human being. His victories were of an immortal character. Second that the people were very jubilant at his victories. This was partly due to the fact that they had approved of his candidature as a successor and partly because these victories enhanced their prestige and extended the limits of their country to the farthest regions, thereby bringing peace and prosperity to the Aryavarta.

In the second part of this line an indication of the surrender of such rulers as were defeated and sought his protection has been given. Samudra Gupta was very ruthless towards those enemies who disobeyed him. He, however, graciously pardoned all those enemies who surrendered to him unconditionally and accepted his protection. These rulers paid him homage which was rightly due and Samudra Gupta showed all kindness to them.

Text :

11. Samgrāmēshu sva-bhuja-vijitā nityam=uchch-āpakārāḥ śvaḥ-śvō mānapra [. . . . .]

tōsh-ōttuṅgaiḥ sphuṭa-bahu-rasa-snēha-phullair=mmanōbhiḥ paśchāttāpam va [. . . . .]ma[m(?)] sy[ā]d=vasa(?)nta[m(?)]

Translation :

"Wrong-doers always were conquered by him in battle and day by day their pride (and mortification) changed into repentance with minds filled with contentment which later on clearly displayed happiness and affection—(something like the rolling of the winter into spring)".

As stated in line 5 Samudra Gupta was a great devotee of truth. He could not tolerate forces of injustice. In this line we are told that he waged incessant wars everywhere against the wrong-doers. He defeated them and made them surrender unconditionally. Their defeat, resulting in subjugation and the fall of their pride by the forces of righteousness, kindled in them a spirit of hatred and revenge. They remained sullen and indifferent for some time but the kindness of Samudra Gupta, which he was always accustomed to show towards his fallen enemies, changed their hearts in due course. Their hatred was converted into affection and their revengeful attitude into repentance (for their past misdeeds and indifference towards Samudra Gupta) and they were contented with their subordinate position. They had come to realise the superior qualities of Samudra Gupta and were not only inclined to acknowledge his supremacy but also developed affection and respect for him.

Text :

13. Udvēl - ōdita - bāhu - viryya - rabhasād=ēkēna yēna kshaṇād=unmūly=Āchyuta Nāgasēna-g[. . .]

dandair=grāhayat=aiva Kōta-kula-jam Pushp-āhvayē krīḍatā sūryyēn ē [— — — —] tata [— — — — — — — —] [||*] [7]

Translation :

"Unassisted by anybody, with the boundless prowess of his own arm, he uprooted Achyuta and Naga Sena and captured him who was born in the family of the Kotas being attracted by the city that had the name of Pushpa."

This is perhaps one of the most important lines of this inscription from the historical point of view. In this details of his early struggles with the rulers of Northern India have been given. The three rulers with whom he engaged in the battle-field at one and the same time were (1) Achyuta Naga, (2) Naga Sena and (3) Ganapati Naga. They were all Naga rulers, who, as is clear from their very titles, were busy in sucking the blood of their poor subjects. They were ruling in places situated in Uttar Pradesh State. It was during his first campaign in Northern India that he fought against the confederacy of these rulers. The names of these rulers have again been mentioned in the second campaign of Samudra Gupta in the North. We can presume that these rulers, after they were once defeated, again rose against Samudra Gupta in league with other Northern rulers, but failed miserably.

Samudra Gupta was determined to liberate Aryavarta from foreign domination. The Nagas were an eyesore to him. They were not only a hindrance in the unity of Northern India but also had no love for the country. They were not good rulers. Their fickle-mindedness and treacherous nature so much annoyed Samudra Gupta that he made up his mind to exterminate them completely from the Indian soil.

Text :

15. Dharmma - prāchīra - bandhaḥ śaśi - kara -śuchayah kīrttayaḥ sa-pratānā vaidushyam tattva-bhēdi praśama [— — — —] uku[—]y k[—]mu(?)t[—u] tārttham(?)

Addhyeyaḥ sūkta-mārggaḥ kavi-mati-vibhav-ōtsāraṇaṃ ch=āpi kāvyam kō nu syād=yō=sya na syād=guṇa-mati-v[i] dushām dhyāna-pātram ya ēkaḥ [||*] 8

Translation :

"His missionary zeal for religion spread his fame, as white as the rays of the moon, far and wide. His wisdom visualized the essential factors of things (and) his calmness enabled him to travel through the path of the

sacred hymns worthy to be studied. Even poetry which gives spontaneous flow to the reflective mind of the poets, was not unknown to him. In short he is an embodiment of all virtues and remains an idol for meditation of those who can understand his merit and intellect."

In this line Samudra Gupta has been eulogised as a religious enthusiast. Although we have nothing on record to prove that, like Asoka, he very actively participated in the religious activities, yet, on the basis of the fact that Hindu missionaries visited East Indies during the Gupta period and spread Saivism and Vaishnavism there, we can presume that he might have patronised some of these missionaries who spread his fame to the far off lands. Another important point to be borne in mind is that Harisena compares his master's fame to the "white rays of the moon". Great men of various ages enjoyed fame of different types. Rulers like Chengiz Khan and Attila were great warriors. They became notorious for their tyrannical and blood-thirsty deeds. Their fame may be compared to the rays of the sun, as they spread fire wherever they went. The messengers of Samudra Gupta, however, gave culture to the backward peoples and enlightened their dark minds with the light of their high civilization. His message had a soothing effect and has been aptly compared with the rays of the moon.

He understood nature in its several facets. His deep knowledge of scripts solved riddles which had so far been shrouded into mystery. He was also a great poet and has a keen taste for poetry. It is really sad that so far we have not come across any work of this great emperor, nor has any other poet of that or later age quoted him or his work.

In the circumstances we can only rely upon the statement of Harisena who himself was a great poet. To sum up, it can be said that Samudra Gupta combined in himself the qualities of a scholar, a missionary and a poet and was worthy of being known all over the world and looked upon with reverence.

Text :

17. Tasya vividha-samara-śat-āvataraṇa-dakshasya sva-bhuja-bala-parākkram-aika-bandhōḥ parākkrām-ānkasya para-śu--śara-śanku-śakti-prās-āsi-tōmara-

bhindipāla-n[ā]rācha - vaitastik-ādy-anēka-praha-raṇa - virūḍh - ākula - vraṇa - śaṭ - āṇka - śobhā - samuday--ōpachita-kāntatara-varshmaṇaḥ

Translation :

"He was dexterous in waging hundreds of various kinds of battles with the only strength of his prowess of arms. The beauty of his charming body was enhanced by the multiplicity of the confused wounds, caused by the blows of battle axes, arrows, spears, pikes, barbed darts, swords, lances, javelines, iron arrows, vaitastikas and many other weapons."

In this line Samudra Gupta has been praised for his warlike qualities. He was an experienced and seasoned soldier. He had a passion for war and was always very enthusiastic to gain more and more experience and knowledge in the battlefield. He was always in the thick of a battle and perhaps that was why his body was covered all over with "a hundred" wounds inflicted by his enemies by the blows of different weapons of war. These wounds glittered on his body like so many stars in the sky on a dark night.

Harisena mentions about hundreds of battles which Samudra Gupta had to fight to become the supreme ruler of India but unfortunately he does not give details of those struggles. The statement thus leaves behind an impression that it was nothing but a poetic exaggeration used by Harisena to lay stress on his qualities as a military leader.

Text :

19. Kausalaka - Mahēndra - Mah[ā*]kāntāraka-Vyāgra-rāja-Kaurālaka - Manṭarāja - Paishṭapuraka - Mahēndra - giri Kauṭṭūraka - Svāmidatt - Airaṇḍapallaka - Damana - Kāñcheyaka Vishnugōp-Āvamuktaka-

Nīlarāja - Vaingēyaka - Hastivarma - Pālakkak-Ōgrasēna - Daivarāshtraka - Kubēra - Kausthalapuraka-Dhanañjaya - prabhriti - sarvva - dakshiṇāpatha - rāja-grahana - mōksh - ānguraha - janita - pratāp - ōnmiśra-mahābhāgyasya

Translation :

"The great fortune of his career attained the pinnacle of glory by his far-sighted policy of liberation after subjugation of Mahendra of Kosala, Vyaghraraja of Mahakantara, Mantaraja of Kerala, Mahendra of Pishtapura, Swamidutta of Kottura on the hill, Damana of Erandapala, Vishnugopa of Kanchi, Nilaraja of Avamukta, Hastiverman of Vengi, Ugrasena of Palakka, Kubera of Devarasthra, Dhanamjaya of Kusthalapura and all the other kings of the Southern regions".

This is also an important line. It gives a description of the Southern campaign of Samudra Gupta and furnishes names of the twelve Southern kings who were defeated by Samudra Gupta. Some of them resisted him individually. However, when they felt the superior strength of his mighty arm, they organised a confederacy under Vishnugopa of Kanchi. The stars of Samudra Gupta, however, were in ascendancy and he successfully broke this confederacy.

Some of the names of the places which have been mentioned along with the names of the kings have been identified with some modern places in Southern India but others as yet remain obscure. Mahendra of Kosala, who was the first king to resist Samudra Gupta during his Southern campaign, was ruling somewhere in the present districts of Rajpur, Sambalpur and Bilaspur situated in Orissa.

Vyaghraraja of Mahakantara seems to be ruling somewhere in the Central India forest regions and was presumably a feudatory chief of the Vakatakas. Samudra Gupta next turned his attention towards Mantaraja of Kerala who was ruling in the Sonpur districts of Madhya Pradesh. Mahendra of Pishtapura was next to feel the might of his arms. He was ruling somewhere in the Godavari District of Andhra Pradesh and was also defeated and compelled to surrender unconditionally. After clearing the great forests of Central India and capturing the territories lying between Mahanadi and Godavari, Samudra Gupta penetrated into Eastern Deccan. Swamidutta of Kottura who was presumably ruling somewhere in modern Kothoor near Mahendragiri in Ganjam District of Orissa tried to check his advance but failed and submitted. Next came the kingdom of Damana of Erandapala which was located somewhere in the district of Vizagapatam (Madras). He was similarly defeated and forced to surrender. The news of these victories of Samudra Gupta created panic in the ranks of the Southern kings and they, instead of facing him in their individual capacity, thought it politic to organise a joint defence. Thus, Vishnugopa, the ruler of Kanchi, whose territories have been identified with the present town of Conjeevaram and its adjoining regions, headed this confederacy. Nilaraja of Avamukta (ruler of Godavari Districts) and Hastiverman of Vengi (ruler of some area in Nellore District) also joined in. Another important point to be borne in mind is that Vishnugopa, who inherited the fortunes of the great Pallava dynasty, and the other two members of the confederacy, were knit up together by their racial ties. It has also been accepted that both Vishnugopa and Hastiverman belonged to the same dynasty. Samudra Gupta met this confederacy most probably somewhere in the north of Madras but it is not possible to locate the exact place of this great conflict. About its results also the historians hold conflicting views.

The territories of Ugrasena of Palakka have been identified with the modern regions of Nellore District and this state seems to have flourished in the neighbourhood of the state of Hastiverman of Vengi. Kubera of Devarasthra

had his seat of Government in the modern district of Vizagapatam while Dhanamjaya of Kusthalapura was ruling somewhere in North Arcot.

As is clear from this line of the inscription after capturing the Southern kings in the battlefield Samudra Gupta set them at liberty. This enhanced his prestige further.

According to Dr. Ray Chaudhary Samudra Gupta played the part of a "Digvijayi" or 'Conqueror of Quarters' of the early Magadhan type. In the South he acted like the 'Dharma Vijayi' or 'Righteous Conqueror' referred to in the epics and Arthashastra i.e. he defeated the kings but did not annex their territory. This far-sighted policy of Samudra Gupta is commendable. Later events have proved the soundness of his policy. Muslim rulers tried to maintain their hold over Southern India from their headquarters in the North but failed. One of them even went to the extent of shifting his capital to a central place like Daulatabad but his plans did not bring any good results. Another king spent the last 25 years of his life in Deccan but failed and dug the grave of his empire there. It was not possible for a single ruler to maintain his hold both over the North and the South. Dr. Altekar feels that the policy of Dharma-Vijayi followed by Samudra Gupta was an indication of his administrative ability and clear far-sightedness. He cherished the idea of the conquest of the whole of India but was also wise enough to visualize the practical difficulties which were to be experienced in its fulfilment. There was no developed communication system and during the rainy season it became all the more difficult to convey or to receive information from the far-flung areas. It was, therefore, rightly decided by Samudra Gupta that it would not be possible to give a strong Government to the far off places. He, therefore, annexed only such areas over which he could conveniently exercise his direct sway. This included names of the nine kings of the Gangetic Plain.

M. Jauvean-Dubreuil is of the opinion that "Samudra Gupta first subjugated some kings, but that very soon he

countered superior forces and was, therefore, obliged to relinquish his conquests and return rapidly to his own states." He has further stated that Samudra Gupta never went beyond Kanchi and his supposed conquest of the Coimbatore and Malabar districts of the Madras Presidency and Maharashtra and Khandesh are mere myths. Dr. Altekar is also of this opinion and he disagrees with Dr. V.A. Smith and other writers who feel that Samudra Gupta conquered the whole of Southern India and came back via Maharashtra and Saurashtra.

According to him the identification of Erandapalla with Erandol in Khandesh and Devarashtra with Maharashtra is incorrect and there is no evidence to show that the Southern invasion of Samudra Gupta resulted in the reduction of Maharashtra also. The Vakatakas, who were ruling there, are not mentioned anywhere in the Allahabad record as feudatories or tributaries. Samudra Gupta's expedition seemed to have been confined mostly to the Madras State. No districts of that state were, however, annexed to the Gupta Empire as it is expressly stated that the kings of the Deccan were uprooted but replanted in their dominions, obviously on their acknowledging the overlordship of the conqueror and agreeing to pay him a tribute.

Howsoever convincing or appealing may be the argument of Dr. Altekar or M. Jauvean-Dubreuil we cannot set aside altogether the verdict about the Southern kings given in the Allahabad Pillar Inscription. We can agree that he did not go beyond Kanchi in the South but we cannot accept the view that Samudra Gupta was defeated by the confederacy of the Southern kings headed by Vishnugopa. The Allahabad Pillar Inscription very clearly mentions the defeat of this confederacy of the Southern kings. There could be so many other factors which could have prevented Samudra Gupta from penetrating further into Southern India even after a victory over the confederacy of the Southern kings. An important factor to be borne in mind is that immediately after his return from Southern India to his capital Samudra

Gupta performed horse-sacrifice which in the normal circumstances he could not think of resorting to after a defeat or humiliation.

Text :

21. Rudradēva - Matila - Nāgadatta - Chandravarmma-Gaṇapatināga - Nāgaśen - Achyuta - Nandi - Balavarmm-ādy - anēk - Āryyāvartta - rāja - prasabh - ōddharaṇ - ōdvṛit-ta - prabhāva - mahataḥ - parichārakīkrita - sarvv - āṭavika-rājasya

Translation :

"His regal splendour only added colours by the ruthless extermination of Rudra Deva, Matila, Naga Datta, Chandra Varman, Ganapati Naga, Naga Sena, Achyuta, Nandan, Bala Verman and many other kings of Aryavarta—and the overthrow of the kings of the forests into servitude."

This line gives us a list of the Northern rulers who, after their defeat, were not restored to their respective territories but were violently exterminated. This policy of ruthless extermination may not appeal to a general reader who would have formed a very high opinion about Samudra Gupta after the study of his Southern campaign. But a critical study of the circumstances under which Samudra Gupta had to adopt this policy would justify his action.

Samudra Gupta was determined to liberate Aryavarta from foreign domination and to give it unity and a benign and national government. This could only be possible after the total extinction of small principalities which were not only a hindrance to the progress of the nation but also stood in the way of achieving the unity of the people of India which was very essential for effecting development in different spheres and enhancing the country's prestige in the eyes of the other nations of world.

He did not annex Southern India in his empire although it was a part of his cherished dream because he knew that it

would be difficult for him to maintain an effective control over those far-flung areas. There was, however, no such problem in Northern India. He was pretty sure that he could effectively control the Northern regions. Maladministration, disinterestedness in the welfare of their native subjects and tyrannical rule of these rulers made him take these steps to liberate these regions and by the extermination of the tyrants to give to the people a benign government.

The third consideration which made him follow this high-handed policy was that the three Naga rulers after their defeat near Kausambi did not accept his overlordship. Taking advantage of his absence in South India they broke into an open revolt. They swelled the ranks of his enemies by joining them openly in the war in which Samudra Gupta was involved immediately after his return from Southern India. Thus Samudra Gupta was justified to take these extreme steps, which in the normal circumstances could not have been expected from a person of his nature.

The fourth factor was that he maintained a huge army. Its maintenance could only be possible in case he had vast resources at his direct command. To be satisfied with the mere state of Magadha under his direct control, while all the North Indian states nominally acknowledged his supremacy, with an autonomous set-up, was politically not expedient. These states, with their resources fully at their disposal, could at any time break their connections with him and create the same old situation which had been controlled earlier after lot of blood-shed.

The territories which were being ruled by the nine uprooted kings of Northern India have been identified as follows :—

1.	Rudra Deva	Bundelkhand.
2.	Matila	Distt. Bulandshahr and some neighbouring regions.

3.	Naga Dutta	Central U.P.
4.	Chandra Verman	Ajmer in Rajasthan.
5.	Ganapati Naga	Gwalior to Sagar district of Madhya Pradesh.
6.	Naga Sena	Mathura.
7.	Achyuta	District of Bareilly and some adjoining territories.
8.	Nandan	Ruling somewhere in Central India.
9.	Bala Verman	Most probably somewhere in Assam.

The above location of the States cannot be accepted without some reservations. The Allahabad Pillar Inscription describes these rulers as the rulers of Aryavarta. But Assam and Bundelkhand do not seem to form a part of that Aryavarta which Samudra Gupta wanted to unite under his direct Government. Further excavations may perhaps throw some further light in the matter and enable us to arrive at some definite conclusions.

The second part of this line describes the defeat and the subjugation of Vakataka rulers of the forest regions of Central India. Dr. Jayaswal is of the opinion that there was a continuous war between the Guptas and the Vakataka rulers for supremacy. Originally, the Guptas held a subordinate position. From this feudatory position they not only regained their independence but also subjugated the Vakatakas and in turn made them accept a feudal rank.

Aiyengar also, on the basis of Puranas and the work of Rama Dasa, makes a mention of the struggle between Samudra Gupta and the Vakataka rulers. According to him Chandra Gupta I seems to have started defying the imperial authority of the old emperor Pravarasena I. Samudra Gupta seems to have crushed his Vakataka contemporary Rudra Sena I thus compelling the Vakatakas into a subordinate alliance with Guptas.

Text : 22

Samataṭa - Davâka - Kâmarûpa - Nêpâla - Kartṛipur - âdipratyanta - nṛipatibhir=Mmâlav - Ârjunâyana-Yaudheya - Mâdrak - Âbhira - Prârjuna - Sanakânika - Kâka-Kharaparik - âdibhiś=cha - sarvvakaradân - âjñâkaraṇa-prâṇâmâ - gamana-

Translation :

"His imperious status was fully acknowledged without any demur, by giving all kinds of taxes, abiding by his orders, and paying homage by the frontier kings of Samatata, Devaka, Kamarupa, Nepala, Kartripura and other (neighbouring States) and by Malavas, Arjunayanas, Yaudheyas, Madrakas, Abhiras, Prarjunas, Sanakanikas, Kakas, Kharapariks and other tribes."

This line contains a list of those frontier states who acknowledged the supremacy of Samudra Gupta without a war. Some of the republican tribes of Punjab have also been mentioned. They had enjoyed their internal autonomy since the days of Mauryas. They have been mentioned in detail in the contemporary Buddhist records. These small republics were never before disturbed by any imperial power. However, after the fall of the Mauryas they started declining. They tried hard to maintain their autonomous status during the period of Sungas and Kanvas. They were partially successful but with the expansion of the Gupta empire these states could not keep themselves isolated and were compelled to submit and acknowledge the supremacy of the Imperial Guptas.

Samudra Gupta adopted quite a different policy towards the frontier states as well as the republican tribes in the Punjab. While in the Gangetic regions he had played the part of a ruthless exterminator of the kingdoms and in the South a liberator of the defeated kings after they acknowledged his supremacy, he followed a very cautious and diplomatic policy towards the rulers of this third category i.e., frontier kings and the republicans. He did not march in person against them but exercised his prowess of arms

against them through various means. Indirectly they were offered the choice of two alternatives, i.e., destruction of their countries like the Northern kingdoms in case of insubordination and indifference, or assurance of peace and prosperity for their states and maintenance of internal autonomy by acceptance of Gupta overlordship. The Gupta ruler did not have actually to carry arms to these frontier states. They voluntarily recognised his supremacy. Mr. Dikshitar has called this policy as that of "the psychological fear impulse." The Gupta ruler too was not very keen to increase his administrative liabilities by annexing these States, who, through this link with advanced and cultured Gupta State, experienced the benefits of a progressive age. It would not be incorrect to call this policy of Samudra Gupta as 'Dig Vijayi' policy.

The principle underlying this arrangement was that the rulers who submitted were not disturbed in their internal administration. They continued to enjoy internal autonomy but they had to acknowledge the supremacy of Samudra Gupta and pay tribute to him as feudatories. They also had to offer him customary presents. They acted as buffer states between his empire and other mighty empires situated on their borders. Their foreign policy was controlled by the Gupta Emperor. Such type of diplomatic victories did not involve any loss of life. Technically, all the lands of the feudal chiefs were considered as a part of the Gupta empire but their chiefs enjoyed practically all the privileges of independent rulers. In fact this arrangement aimed at political rather than administrative unity. It was a common defence pact and the union was nothing more than a loosely-knit confederation wherein the liberty of the individual was respected.

The location of these frontier states and republican tribes has been identified as follows :—

Samatata, Devaka and Kamrupa were all situated in modern Assam in the north-east of the Gupta Empire and have been identified with modern Badkamta, Dabok and Gauhati respectively. Nepal can be identified with the modern Nepal with some boundary adjustments here and

there. The state of Kartripura consisted of modern Kumaon, Garhwal and Rohilkhand Districts. All these States most probably developed relations with the Imperial Gupta monarch for the development and progress of their respective states in the social, economic and political fields. Samudra Gupta perhaps would not have thought of attacking these hilly regions where there were few chances to gain anything and many chances to suffer heavy losses. The later kings like Aurangzeb suffered heavy losses when they attacked these regions. Even the long arms of Bakhtiar Khilji (a general of Mohd. Gauri, who, it is said, had so long arms that he could touch the ground when standing) could not reach these countries and he lost his life in subduing these regions !

Samudra Gupta's imperialism in relation to these states can be expressed in these words of H.G. Wells : "A powerful and advanced nation was conceded the right to dominate a group of other less-advanced nations or less politically developed nations or peoples whose nationality was still undeveloped, who were expected by the dominating nation to be grateful for its protection and dominance." The acknowledgement of supremacy of Samudra Gupta was due to his superiority over the rulers of these states in the different fields of activities, and the tributes and the presents paid by them were in return for the benefits of high culture and civilization bestowed upon these people by the Indian genius.

The nine republican tribes have been connected with the regions as mentioned below :—

1. *Malavas :* They have been identified by some historians with the old tribe of the Mallois, who were inhabiting the regions of Multan during Alexander's invasion. They acquired undying fame for themselves by offering a very tough resistance to Alexander when he passed through their country. Now, however, they had neither their old chivalrous spirit, nor their grand army and they thought it politic to acknowledge Gupta supremacy.

2. *Arjunayanas :* It is stated that they were living somewhere in the modern Bharatpur State. Discovery of their coins in that region confirms this view.

3. *Yaudheyas :* They are said to be ruling somewhere in the south of Jullundur Doab region.

4. *Madrakas :* Their seat of government has been identified with the modern city of Sialkot (West Pakistan) which a few centuries later became the capital of the Huns.

5. *Abhiras :* They were probably living somewhere in southern parts of the Punjab from where they migrated to Central India later on.

6. *Prarjunas :* Their territories have been identified with the modern district of Narsinghpur.

7. *Sanakanikas :* They were living in Eastern Malwa. One of their rulers has been mentioned in the Udayagiri Cave Inscription of Chandra Gupta II.

8. *Kakas :* They were presumably living in Sanchi, a place of historic importance.

9. *Kharaparikas :* Most probably they were ruling somewhere in Central India.

Text :

23. paritōshita - prachaṇḍa - śāsanasya anēka - bhrashṭa-rājyotsanna - rājavamśa - pratishṭhā - pan -ōdbhūṭa - nikhila-bh[uva]na - vicha[ra]ṇa - śānta - yāśasaḥ Daivaputra - Shāhi-Shāhānushāhi - Saka - Muruṇḍaih Saimhalak - ādibhiś=cha

sarvva - dvīpa vāsibhir=ātmanivedana - kanyōpā-yanadāna - garutmadaṅka - svavishayabhukti - śāsana[y] āchan - ādy - upāya - sēvā - krita - bāhu - vīryya - prasara-dharaṇi - bandhasya pri(pṛi)thivyām=a - pratirathasya

sucharita - śat - ālaṅkrit - ānēka - guṇa - gaṇ-otisiktibhiś=charana - tala - pramrisht - ānya - narapati-kīrtteḥ sāddhv - asādh - ûdaya - pralaya - hētu - purushasy=ā - chintyasya bhakty - avanati - mātra - grāhya - mṛidu-hṛidayasy=anukampāvato=nēka - gō - śata - sahasra - pra-dāyinaḥ

Translation :

"His far-reaching fame, deep-rooted in peace, emanated from the restoration of the sovereignty of many fallen royal families. The integration of the whole world thus brought about solely by his prowess was manifested by their subjects offering as sacrifices, presents of beautiful maidens, Garuda token of surrender, and all the opulence and enjoyment of their territories placed at his disposal. His orders were solicited by the Daivaputras—Shahis—Shahanushahis, Sakas—Murundas and the people of Simhalas and all other dwellers of that island. He, who had no equal in power in the world, eclipsed the fame of the other kings by the radiance of his versatile virtues, adorned by innumerable good actions. He, who was enigmatic, was the real force that generated good and destroyed the evil. Having a compassionate heart, he could easily be won over by faithfulness, loyalty and homage. He was the giver of several thousand cows in charity".

This line enumerates the various qualities of Samudra Gupta. It begins with the description of his popularity and fame which, unlike other great warriors, he earned by his kind policy towards his fallen enemies. Samudra Gupta was very considerate towards the second and third categories of rulers stated earlier, i.e. the rulers of Southern India, who were defeated and made prisoners but were reinstated as tributaries, and frontier kings, who were permitted to enjoy their administrative freedom in return for accepting him as their suzerain. This Dharam Vijayi policy made his fame travel far and wide.

Another point which stands to his credit was that the integration and unification of India was brought about not by mobilizing the armies and marching in person by the king against the rival chiefs but by means of the 'psychological fear' of the strength of his arms. Another important factor which made the frontier chiefs accept his supremacy was that they well understood his superior qualities, and reasonable and benign nature. They also knew

that none of them could resist his mighty arm and whosoever dared to oppose was bound to suffer. They thus surrendered unconditionally and as a token of their submission sent him presents of maidens and also offered him all such objects of pleasure as could possibly be placed at his disposal. According to Dr. Altekar the term 'presents of maidens' signifies the matrimonial alliances which were concluded by the frontier kings with the Gupta monarch as a token of their sincerity and loyalty. The frontier kings offered their daughters to the Gupta ruler in marriage, and not in a way that they may become his maid-servants.

We are also told that his orders were obeyed by Daivaputras-Shahis-Shahanushahis, Sakas-Murundas and the people of Simhalas and all other dwellers of that island. It is therefore evident that Samudra Gupta had established his sway from Bengal in the East to Afghanistan in the North-West and from Nepal and Garhwal in the North to Ceylon in the South and rulers like Daivaputras-Shahis-Shahanushahis (descendants of Kanishka who still held some posts in the North-West) Sakas-Murundas (of the Saka-Schythian blood ruling in Western India) and the people of Simhalas (modern Ceylon) had voluntarily entered into subordinate alliance with him. As a mark of their humiliation, they sent him rich presents and also sent their ambassadors to the royal court. They were inclined to pay their homage even personally if the great king so desired but that occasion never arrived.

Samudra Gupta was without his equal in the contemporary world. He paled into insignificance other rival counterparts by his superior qualities in peace and war. He was a true embodiment of virtues. People failed to understand him and were simply confused and bewildered when they tried to assess his worth.

He was a great champion of goodness and the destroyer of evil. He patronised everything which was good even if he had to suffer for it at times. He discarded what was evil even at the cost of his popularity.

He had a very kind heart and could be won over by submission, sincerity and loyalty. All those rulers who paid him homage and repented for their past misdeeds were graciously pardoned.

He was also a great philanthropist and used to give in charity thousands of cows.

The study of this line enables us to understand that he was a great king who combined in himself the rare virtues and qualities which are seldom found in a single individual.

Text :

26. kṛipaṇa - dīn - ānâth - âtura - jan - ōdharaṇa-sa(ma)ntradīksh - ādy - upagata - manasaḥ samiddhasya vigrahavatō - lōk - ānugrahasya Dhanada - Varuṇ - Ēndr-Āntaka - samasya - sva - bhuja - bala - vijit - ānēka - narapati-vibhava - pratyarppanâ - nitya - vyāpṛt - āyuktapurushasya

Translation :

"With the support and approach of the miserable, poor, destitute and afflicted, his mind was ever engaged for their amelioration. He was the glorified personification of kindness to humanity and was equal to the gods Dhanada, Varuna, Indra and Antaka in their dominant and respective qualities. His officers were set out in restoring the financial position of the various kings conquered by him."

Here the author not only mentions the humanitarianism of Samudra Gupta but also tells us about his treatment of the defeated kings, his personal qualities and the extent of his empire. It is not for the first time that we find him praising Samudra Gupta for his kind heartedness. Again and again he impresses upon his audience that Samudra Gupta was a true incarnation of mercy. He was so passionately and whole-heartedly absorbed in improving the lot of the down-trodden, destitute, miserable and helpless, suffering humanity that he was in the true sense of the word a god of mercy. He showed the same zeal and passion to the suffering humanity as for his wars and struggles.

It would appear somewhat very strange to call him in the same breath a warrior as well as a champion of the suffering humanity. How could a hero of hundreds of battles be a lover of humanity? A deep and critical study of the achievements and character of Samudra Gupta, however, will convince us of the truth of the above statement. Samudra Gupta struggled hard in the North and fought several pitched battles for the liberation of the people from the tyrannous and blood-thirsty rulers who had no sympathy for their subjects. It was to relieve the humanity from the clutches of these despotic kings that he risked his life many a time in the thick of battles. Indeed, all the scars on his body represented his personal sufferings and sacrifices for the oppressed masses of the Aryavarta. Had he really been a militarist or an imperialist, like Alexander or Napoleon, he would not have set at liberty the Southern kings after their defeat and capture. Whether he was always devoted to the oppressed and the suffering humanity can be well-judged from the fact that he passed the last 25 years of his life in bettering the lot of his subjects than thinking in terms of the further expansion of his empire.

Samudra Gupta, like Asoka, expressed solicitude for the people committed to his care, and was kind even to his defeated enemy. Like Asoka he knew no rest and always aimed at achieving the prosperity of his subjects. Perhaps that was why India looked so pleasant a country to the Chinese visitor, Fahien, when he visited it a few years after the death of Samudra Gupta.

Samudra Gupta has been compared with the gods like Dhanada, Varuna, Indra and Antaka in their respective qualities. It is not for the first time that we find him compared with the different gods. Also, he is not an exceptional case in the Imperial Gupta history. Some other Gupta kings have similarly been compared with the various gods. In his coins also we find him compared with the gods. God Dhanada is the Lord of wealth and is a guardian of the North. Varuna is known as the sea god and is the guardian of the West. Antaka or Yama, the god of death is the guardian of the South while Indra, the king of the

celestials is known as the guardian of the East. Presumably this comparison of Samudra Gupta with the four gods was made to throw an indirect hint to the extension of his empire from the Western to the Eastern seas and from the Himalayas to the farthest place in the South. Perhaps Samudra Gupta got his name from 'Samudra' and his original name was different—'Kaca' according to a set of historians. His victories in the South had resulted in his procuring a vast booty. According to Dr. V. A. Smith he returned 'laden with golden booty' from the South. His vast riches made Harisena compare him with the god Dhanada. His control over the seas, surrounding the Indian peninsula, made his court historian compare him with god Varuna. He was the slayer of the Nagas and his battle-axe coin tells us that he brought death in the rank and file of his enemies. Death or surrender were perhaps the only two alternatives offered to his enemies. There is thus every justification for comparing him with the god Antaka (the god of death).

In the last part of this line we are told that his officers were deputed to help the fallen kings in the restoration of normal situation in their respective territories and for the economic, social and cultural progress of their states.

Text 27 :

niśita - vidagdha - mati - gāndharvva - lal itair= vrīdita - tridaśapatiguru - Tumburu - Nāradāder=vvidvaj-jan ōpajīvy - ānēka - kāvya - kkriyābhiḥ pratishṭhita - kavi-rāja - śabdasya suchira - stōtavy - ānēk - ādbhut - ōdāra-charitasya

Translation :

"Kasyapa, the Guru of Indra (the lord of gods), Tumburu and Narada (famous for their musical accomplishment) and others, paled into insignificance by his sharp and cultured intellect and musical talent. By virtue of his various exquisite poems, he reigned supreme as the king of poets among the learned people whose main-

stay was poetry. Really, his wonderful and noble deeds are worthy to be cherished and praised for ever."

In this line the author of the inscription praises the cultural and musical accomplishments of Samudra Gupta. He compares his achievements in the field of music with Kasyapa, the Guru of Indra, Tumburu and Narada, who were the past masters in this art and writes that he surpassed all of them in this field. They were forgotton and paled into insignificance when the master-musician (Samudra Gupta) played on veena. This view has also been supported by one of the coins of Samudra Gupta whrein he is shown seated on a couch with a veena in his lap. Harisena further writes that he was a good poet as well and could compose couplets of a very high order. By his poems, which he wrote in his leisure time, he won a very high place among the contemporary poets.

It is unfortunate that so far we have not come across even a single couplet composed by Samudra Gupta although he has been very much extolled for his poetical accomplishments in the inscription.

Text :

28. **lōka - samaya - kkriy - ānuvidhāna - mātra - mānushasya - lōka - dhāmnō - dēvasya mahārāja - śri - Gupta-prapautrasya mahārāja - śri Ghaṭoṭkacha - pautrasya mahārājādhirāja - śri - Chandragupta - putrasya**

Translation :

"Only in celebrating the rites and ceremonies of the mankind he was a mortal or else he was a god incarnate. He was the son of the grandson of the Maharaja, the illustrious Sri Gupta who was the grandson of the Maharaja, the illustrious Ghatotkacha. He was the son of the Maharajadhiraja, the glorious Chandra Gupta I and of Mahadevi Kumara Devi, daughter of the son of Lichchhavis".

This line is of special interest as well as importance as it not only makes us acquainted with the ancestors of Samudra Gupta but also indicates their position as rulers.

It has been very helpful in solving the controversy about the ancestors of the Gupta ruler and their status. Another important feature to be noted is that Samudra Gupta seems to be very particular in making a mention of his mother and the clan of the Lichchhavis to which she belonged. This line lends support to the conclusions we arrive at, about the importance of the Lichchhavis, after the study of the only coin issued during the days of Chandra Gupta I.

The study of this line clarifies the fact that Sri Gupta, and Ghatotkacha, the great-grand-father and grand-father respectively of Samudra Gupta did not enjoy any independent position and were only Maharajas. Chandra Gupta I, the father of Samudra Gupta, was the first of the Imperial Guptas to take up the proud independent title of Maharajadhiraja. The independent position was presumably gained through the support of and matrimonial relations with the Lichchhavis. Thus Samudra Gupta does not forget to make a mention of his mother and her clan in this line.

Another interesting point to be borne in mind is that Samudra Gupta has been stated as a god incarnate but for the observance of a few rites and ceremonies in which respect only he resembled the mortals. Even in his coins Samudra Gupta has been compared with the different gods. We come across so many other instances in the Gupta history where the rulers have been identified with gods. Samudra Gupta, indeed, had in him all the god-like qualities. He was very humane, always inclined to help the oppressed and down-trodden and to forgive the culprits and offenders if they admitted their crimes.

Text :

29. Lichchavi - dauhitrasya mahādēvyām Kumāradevyām=utpha(tpa)nnasya mahārājādhi rāja - śri - Samudraguptasya sarvva - pṛithivī - vijaya - janit - ōdaya - vyāpta-nikhil - āvanitalām kīrttim=itas=tridaśapati-

Translation :

"This lofty column, as it were an arm of this earth, proclaims that Maharajadhiraja, the glorious Samudra

Gupta, who has far-reaching fame by his extensive conquests (of the whole world) and development of the conquered regions, has departed hence and is now having the sweet happiness in the abode of Indra, the lord of the gods."

This line starts with a description of the Allahabad Pillar and ends with the departure of the great victor of the hundreds of battles for his heavenly abode. The fame and greatness of Samudra Gupta rested not only on his victories in the battle-field but also on the development of the conquered regions. It would be more correct to say that his fame lay in fact in the rehabilitation of the persons, rendered homeless due to wars, and in the establishment of a better Government in the conquered regions. He made extensive conquests not to satisfy his lust for power but to extend the benefits of his benign government to the farther regions. The people under him experienced the real happiness and led very peaceful and prosperous lives. Therein lay his greatness. If, like Attilla, he had simply been a conqueror, he would have been notorious for his passion for war and destruction.

The great man departed, says the author, and is now having the sweet happiness in the abode of Indra. The author is sure that by his works of public utility, devotion to duties and love for the human-beings Samudra Gupta had made for himself a respectable place even beyond the heavens. He thus feels that a befitting place for him in the next world was the abode of Indra, the lord of Devas and the ruler of Heaven.

The last part of this line leaves behind the impression that the Allahabad Pillar Inscription was a posthumous inscription. This, however, does not seem to be the correct position. There is no mention of the famous horse-sacrifice in the Allahabad Pillar Inscription which perhaps was one of the most important events of the period of Samudra Gupta. Samudra Gupta, in order to give impression of his supremacy over all the rulers of India, had performed this

sacrifice. He even issued coins to commemorate this great event. This evidence has established the performance of this ceremony as an undisputed fact. The sacrifice was performed sometime after his victories over the rulers of Northern and Southern regions. Samudra Gupta lived for a long time after this event. The Allahabad Pillar Inscription thus does not seem to be complete in all respects for after all it is a posthumous inscription.

Text :

30. bhavana - gaman - Âvāpta - lalita - sukha - vicharaṇām - āchakshāṇa iva bhuvô bahur - ayam=uchchritaḥ stambhah [||] yasya | pradāna - bhujavikkrama - praśama-śāstravāky - ōdayair - uparyupari - sañchay - ōchchhritam=anēka - mārggam yaśah

Translation :

"By the development of this spirit of toleration, prowess of arms, mental composure, attained by the study of the tenets of scriptures, his fame mounted higher and higher, travelling in many ways with purifying effects in the three worlds, like the holy, pale-yellow water of Ganga, surging on liberation from the matted hair of the god Pashupati".

Here the author speaks about the growing fame of Samudra Gupta in the different parts of the world due to his religious toleration, victorious career and the literary achievement, and compares it with the holy water of Ganges which has a purifying effect.

In spite of the fact that there was a very serious rivalry between Hinduism and Buddhism and the religious preachers of the two religions were sworn enemies of each other, Samudra Gupta is to be accredited with a tolerant religious policy, which is all the more noticeable when he was a worshipper of Siva. His culture and high learning prevented him from becoming a bigotted Hindu. He was very broad-minded. It can be well judged from the fact that he graci-

ously, and with the least hesitation, permitted the Ceylonese king to build a monastery at Gaya when the latter approached him with a request for it. He showed his equal respect to the religious preachers of the two rival religions. Literary tradition tells us that Vasubandhu, a great scholar and philosopher received the full measure of hospitality at his court.

His victories, indeed, were the real cause for his fame abroad. The world those days showed more respect for the persons who won laurels in the battle-field, than in any other field of human activity. This was perhaps one of the reasons why the distant rulers were keen to develop ambassadorial ties with him and also sent him presents of different types.

About the literary achievements of the great ruler it is really difficult to write as precisely as about his other great qualities which made him known and famous all over the world. His age was an age of renaissance in the field of literary activities. People from all over the world were keen to visit India and to see for themselves the great cultural and progressive age through which this country was passing then. According to Dr. Radha Kumud Mookerjee, Indian knowledge and wisdom were eagerly and devoutly sought after by the best Chinese minds. The enthusiastic and perilous journeys of Chinese sages to India are only a tribute paid by China to the sovereignty of Indian thought, whose influence extended far beyond her geographical confines and built up a greater India.

It was mainly due to the encouragement of the ruler that the literary activities received so great an impetus. Harisena was himself a man of not an average ability and common standard. He was a renowned scholar of his time and his acknowledgement of the qualities of head and heart of Samudra Gupta should be taken as a sufficient proof of the latter's literary achievements.

Thus his fame travelled in the three different worlds and had a purifying effect like the water of the holy Ganges, surging on liberation from the matted hair of god, Pashupati. This has reference to the mythical legend* that the river Ganges actually had its source somewhere in the Heaven. When Bhagirath brought it down it was feared that the fall of the water from such a great height would have a terrific force. To break this force Lord Shiva, who is supposed to be living on 'Kailash Parbat', received the water of the holy Ganges in his matted hair. It went on wandering there for thousands of years. It was permitted to descend on earth only when it had lost its terrific force.

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*THE HOLY GANGES AND BHAGIRATH

Long, long ago, a famous King, named Sagar ruled over Ayodhia. He had two queens, Keshini and Sumati. By virtue of his steadfast "Bhakti" the king got a son, Asmanjas from Keshini and sixty thousand sons from Sumati. Asmanjas was ill tempered and cruel and used to drown young children of tender age in water. King Sagar got infuriated at his criminal behaviour and banished him from his kingdom. Asmanjas had a very humble and obedient son called Anshuman who strongly safeguarded the horse of Ashvamedha-yag performed by king Sagar against heavy onslaughts of the enemies. Indra, the god-king of gods of Heaven, grew jealous. Somehow or the other he stole the horse for fear of losing his Kingdom of Heaven and tied it behind the famous sage Kapil who was sitting absorbed in his samadhi. King Sagar ordered his sixty thousand sons to go and look for the lost horse. As soon as they neared the hut of the enlightened sage Kapil they mistook the sage for an undesirable thief and started keeping their watch over him. No sooner did Kapil understand their mean motive then he cursed them and reduced them into ashes. King Sagar grew impatient over the long absence of his sons and ordered his grand son Anshuman to search for his uncles. Anshuman's grief knew no bounds at the sight of his uncles ashes. He thought of offering holy water to his uncles' departed souls but failed to obtain any such water. Garuda, the bird-god, advised Anshuman to procure holy water of the Ganges from Heaven with a view to redeem his uncles of their accursed death.

Anshuman returned home aggrieved and disappointed. King Sagar, Anshuman and Dalip, all three of them devoted themselves, heart and soul, to the untiring and staunch Bhakti of God for years together to get holy water of Ganges from Heaven but all in vain.

At last the famous and enlightened son of king Dalip named Bhagirath took up an oath of undertaking relentless and ceaseless Bhakti of God. Lord Brahma got immensely pleased with Bhagirath's fervent prayer and granted him a boon of recovery of the holy water of Ganges. Lord Siva granted him a boon of holding the Ganges in his hair (JATA). Finally, Bhagirath's bhakti brought the holy Ganges glittering down from Heaven into this mortal world. It followed Saint Bhagirath in the form of a river right up to the hut of sage Kapil and relieved the sixty thousand dead sons of king Sagar of the curse of the sage and granted salvation to them and other ancestors of king Sagar as well.

Text :

31. punāti bhuvana - trayam Paśupater=jjaṭ - āntar-guhā - nirōdha - parimōksha - śighram=iva pāṇḍu Gāngam p [ayaḥ] [||] Ētach=cha kāvyam—ēshām=ēve bhaṭṭāraka-pādānām dasasya samipa - parisarppāṇ - ānugrah onmīlita-matēḥ

Khādyatapākikasya mahādaṇḍanāyaka Dhruva-bhūti putrasya sāndhivigrahika kumārāmātya - ma [hādaṇ-ḍanāya] ka Harishēṇasya sarvva bhūta - hita sukhāy= āstu | (||)

Translation :

"Let this work of Khadyatapa Kika, the son of Mahadandanayaka Dhruvabhuti, the Samdhivigrahika and Kumaramatya, the Mahadandanayaka, Hari Sena, —who is the beneficiary from Bhattaraka, having developed his mental acumen by constantly remaining in his presence —be for the welfare and happiness of all existing humanity."

In this line the author makes us acquainted with his name, his status, the name of his father and the status of his father. We gather that Hari Sena, the author of this inscription was the Minister of Peace and War in the government of Samudra Gupta. He accompanied the King in all his wars and thus he must have been an eye-witness of his master's victories. It confirms the authenticity of the contents of the Pillar Inscription of Allahabad. The author further writes that his developed out-look and literary advancement was due to the constant company of the learned King. Hari Sena thus indirectly impresses upon his readers the greatness of Samudra Gupta in the literary and poetic accomplishments. In the last few words he dedicates this inscription to the welfare of the community.

Text :

33 Anushṭhitam cha paramabhaṭṭāraka pād anu-dhyātēna mahādaṇḍanāyaka Tilabhaṭṭakēna

Translation :

"The matter of this work has been accomplished or finalized by Mahadandanayaka, Tilabhattasaka who meditates at the feet of Parama Bhattasakas i.e. Chandra Gupta II who richly deserves reverence or homage, was bestowed with this technical title indicative of supreme Sovereignty."

ERAN STONE INSCRIPTION OF SAMUDRA GUPTA

This inscription was discovered by General Cunningham in the Saugar district of Madhya Pradesh in 1876-77. It has survived the ravages of time although at some places it is completely broken, resulting in the loss of its date. It is written in Sanskrit and is in the verse style. The name of Samudra Gupta has been mentioned in the tenth line. The first part, which is missing, presumably contained a description of his ancestors. There is no mention of his successors and it is on the whole a description of the personal qualities of the great king.

Its first six lines have been completely lost. In the seventh line Samudra Gupta has been compared with some other rulers and it is stated that he surpassed them in charity.

The text and translation of the inscription is as below :—

Text :

9. . . . . . babhûva Dhanad-Ântaka-tushṭi-kōpa-tulyaḥ
ma-nayena Samudraguptah
. . . . pya pārtthiva-gaṇas-sakalah prithivyâm
sta(?sva)-rājya-vibhava-ddhrutam-āsthito-
bhût

Translation :

"There was Samudra Gupta, equal to god Dhanada when pleased and god Antaka when annoyed.. All the other kings were subjugated and stripped off their wealth and sovereignty by him."

In this line we find a comparison of Samudra Gupta with gods like Dhanada and Antaka—the gods of pleasure and anger respectively. This is similar to the description in the Allahabad Pillar Inscription. The explanation of this comparison probably is that when the great king was in a mood of pleasure he distributed wealth lavishly like god Dhanada. However, in anger he acted like god Antaka because the unfortunate person with whom he grew angry was sure to lose his life. The writer also acquaints us with his ever-victorious career and says that all the rulers on the earth were defeated by him and reduced to the position of subordinates. The statement is confirmed by the Allahabad Pillar Inscription wherein, a long list of rulers, who were subjugated by Samudra Gupta and forced to accept his supremacy, has been given. Loss of wealth was suffered by the Southern kings whose treasuries were despoiled by the Gupta invader. The Northern rulers suffered still greater i.e. the loss of their sovereignty.

Text :

13. ....na.. ...bhakti-naya-vikkrama-tōshitēna
[yo] ...rāja-sabda-vibhavair=abhishēchan-ādyaiḥ [|*]
.. ..nitah.. .. parama-tushṭi-puraskṛitēna
.. ..vo ....nṛipatir= aprativāryya-vīryyaḥ -

Translation :

"When satisfied by the loyalty, policy and prowess, he bestowed upon them the glories consisting of the sprinkling, etc. that befits the title of kings—such action gave him supreme satisfaction. He was really a king whose valour and vigour could not be resisted by any one."

It tells us about the policy which Samudra Gupta adopted towards his adversaries. As stated earlier, Samudra Gupta followed a policy of ruthless extermination towards all such enemies, who defied him and rejected his offer for a peaceful treaty and acknowledgment of his supremacy. His policy, however, towards all such enemies, as sincerely repented over their past behaviour, was admirable. We are

told that when he was satisfied by their devotion, like a brave man, he not only pardoned them but also tried, in every possible way, to console them for the loss of their position by accepting his over-lordship. He bestowed upon them favours in different ways. He was a man of energy, vigour and courage. There was none who could resist him. In the end all had to kiss the threshold of his royal bounties and to eat a humble pie.

Text :

17. .. .. sya paurushа-parākkrama-datta-śulkā [hasty-a]śva - ratna - dhana - dhānya - samṛiddhi-yuktā [1*]
ṅ=gṛihēshu . . muditā . bahu-putra-pautra-[sa]nkrāmiṇī kula-vadhuḥ vratinī nivishṭā [11*] 5

Translation :

"He was married to a faithful wife who was virtuous. She was provided, from his many resources, with innumerable elephants and horses in addition to hoards of money and grain. She visited in delight the houses of her kith and kin and strolled about in the company of her many sons and grandsons."

We find, perhaps for the first time, a mention of his queen Dutta Devi. There are many coins on which Samudra Gupta and his queen have presented together. In the inscriptions, however, this is the only example. It is stated here that the queen was very faithful to Samudra Gupta and was virtuous as well. Here, a strange contrast may be drawn of the Indian Napoleon (he has been designated so by some historians) with Napoleon Bonaparte who unlike his Indian counterpart was unfortunate in this respect. Both his vigour and humour were converted into irritation and frustration in the later part of his life by his disappointment and failure in winning the loyalty of his wife.

It has also been mentioned that the queen possessed many elephants and horses and a lot of gold and silver, and

grains. In the last part of this line we are told of the real secret of her happiness, but for which, the whole of her wealth, horses, elephants and the grand kingdom would have been of no use. She, indeed, was the happiest lady as she was not only a mother and a grandmother but also had become a great-grandmother. She enjoyed the happiness by her virtues and true, sincere and extreme devotion to her husband.

Text :

24. [Yas] y= ōrjjitam samara-karmma parākkram-ēddham
.... yaśaḥ su-vipulam=paribambhramīti [|*]
.... ni. yasya.. ripavaś=cha raṇ-ōrjjitāni
.. [sva]pn-āntarēshv=api vichintya paritrasanti [||*] 6

Translation :

"His deeds in battle, inspired by prowess, made him famous far and wide. Even in dreams, his enemies were terrified when they saw his valient deeds in vigorous wars."

Here we find a mention of his warlike qualities. According to it the king could be seen in his true colour when he was on the battle-field. His fame, which was based on his warlike qualities, travelled all over the world and his enemies grew pale on hearing his name. Even when they happened to see him in a dream they were very much terrified.

Text :

25. pta(?)ḥ sva-bhōga-nagar-Airikiṇa-pradēśe [|*]
... .[sam]sthāpitas=sva yaśasaḥ paribriṁhaṇ(n)-ārttham [||*] 7
... . .vō nṛipatir=āha yadā

Translation :

"For the sake of enhancing his fame, he set up a city in 'Airikina', mainly for his enjoyment."

The city of Eran (Airikina) is the place where this stone inscription was set up. It was selected by the king for merry-making. In the first part of the line the author frankly admits the main object of his stone inscription. He says that it was set up to augment the fame of Samudra Gupta which had already spread beyond the confines of Asia. The rest of the inscription is unfortunately missing.

The study of this inscription supplements our knowledge about Samudra Gupta. It confirms the information obtained from the Allahabad Pillar Inscription and the coins of Samudra Gupta. The name of Dutta Devi can be clearly read. She was most probably the chief queen who also appears on the Ashvamedha coins of Samudra Gupta.

Udayagiri Cave Inscription of Chandra Gupta II

To General Cunningham goes the credit for the discovery of this inscription. It was found in Udayagiri Caves near Bhilsa. It seems to have been engraved sometime in 401-2 A.D. In this inscription two figures are represented which, according to Dr. Fleet, belong to the four-armed god, Vishnu, attended by his two wives; and a twelve-armed goddess, presumably Lakshmi, the consort of Vishnu rather than Mahishasuri i.e. Durga, the consort of Shiva, as suggested by General Cunningham.

The main object of this inscription was to record a gift by a feudatory chief of Chandra Gupta II. A few of its lines are not legible but the inscription itself is useful and provides some knowledge about the state religion.

Mathura Stone Inscription of Chandra Gupta II

It is another important inscription of Chandra Gupta II and is well preserved at Lahore. It was discovered in 1853 by General Cunningham and in spite of the fact that a few

of its lines have been lost, it is very useful for the historical facts narrated in it. Its first line reads as follows :—

Text :

1....... [Sarvva-rāj-ōchhēttuḥ pṛithiv] y [ām=apratiratha]

[sya. .*chatur-udadhi-sali] l-āsvādita-ya[śaśo Dha-]

[nada-varuṇ-Endr-Antaka-sa] masya Kṛitānta-[paraśoh]

[nyāy - āgat - ānēka - gō]- hiraṇya - kōṭi - prada[sya chir-ō]-

Translation :

"He was the destroyer of all kings and with no rivals in the world. His fame had gone up to the waters of the four oceans. In short he was equal to the gods Dhanada, Varuna, Indra and Antaka. In prowess, he was the very axe of Kritanta. In charity he gave many millions of cows and gold. 'Ashvamedha Yagya' which was in abeyance for many years was restored by him."

This line gives the impression that Samudra Gupta exterminated all the rulers who opposed him in the battle-field. But it is now well-known that this policy was adopted only in the case of the rulers of Aryavarta. Without their ruthless extermination Samudra Gupta could neither claim the title of a ruler of Aryavarta nor his empire could have known peace. These rulers were of a very treacherous and cruel nature and met their end in the way they deserved. This confirms what has been stated by Hari Sena in Allahabad Pillar Inscription about the policy of Samudra Gupta.

Samudra Gupta has further been described as a ruler who had no rival of his calibre and might in the world. This statement has been confirmed by his Ashvamedha coins which could only have been issued after he had subjugated all the rulers of the North and the South. His fame spread in all directions, even beyond the confines of Indian peninsula. He was the supreme authority from the Northern

mountains to the Southern seas and from the Eastern to the Western Oceans.

This is perhaps why he has been compared with the great gods like Dhanada, Varuna, Indra and Antaka. It is not for the first time that we find him compared with various gods nor is he an exception to enjoy this comparison. In Line 26 of the Allahabad Pillar Inscription also he has been compared with these gods. Some other Gupta kings have similarly been compared with the various gods. He has also been accredited for the performance of Ashvamedha ceremony which had been in abeyance for a very long time. This has been confirmed by his Ashvamedha coins.

Text :

5. [tsann-aśvamēdh-āharttur= mma] hārājā-śrī-Gupta-prapau[t] r[asya]

[mahārāja-śrī-Ghaṭōtka]cha-pautrasya mahārāja-dhir[āja]-

[śrī-Chandragupta-pu] trasya Lichchhavi-dauhitrasya mahā[dē]

Translation :

"He was the great-grandson of the famous Maharaja Gupta, grandson of Maharaja Ghatotkacha and son of the Maharajadhiraja, glorious Chandra Gupta I. He was the son of the daughter of the Lichchhavis."

This line is of special interest and importance as it not only makes us acquainted with the ancestors of Chandra Gupta II but also indicates their position as rulers. It has been very helpful in solving the controversy about the ancestors of the Gupta rulers and their status. Another important feature which may be noted in this line is that Chandra Gupta II seems to be very particular in linking his name with his grandmother and the clan of the Lichchhavis to which she belonged. This line lends support to the conclusion we arrive at otherwise about the importance of the Lichchhavis.

This evidence clarifies the fact that Sri Gupta, and Ghatotkacha, the great-grandfather and grandfather respectively of Samudra Gupta did not enjoy any independent position and were only Maharajas. Chandra Gupta I, father of Samudra Gupta, was the first of the Imperial Guptas to take up the proud independent title of Maharajadhiraja. The independent position was presumably gained through the support of Lichchhavis with whom they had matrimonial relations. Thus Chandra Gupta II does not forget to make a mention of his grandmother and her clan in this line.

Text :

8. [vyām] [Kumāra] d [ē]vyām= utpannasya mahārājādhirā-

[ja-śrī-Sa mudraguptasya putrēṇa tat-parigṛi-]

[hi] t [ē]na mahādēv[y]ām Dat [t]adēv[y]am= ut[p]an[n]ē-

Translation :

"He was the son of Maharajadhiraja, the glorious Samudra Gupta and Mahadevi Dutta Devi and was accepted as his successor."

From this line it appears that Chandra Gupta II was selected by his father as his successor. It also shows that he was a son of Samudra Gupta by Queen Dutta Devi. This line has created a lot of complication for those scholars who have accepted Rama Gupta as the immediate successor of Samudra Gupta. If Samudra Gupta had nominated Chandra Gupta II as his successor, how could Rama Gupta come in between the two great rulers. The question remains undecided.

Text :

11. [ṇa paramabhāgavatēna mahārājādhirāja-śrī -

[Chandraguptēna] . ...

Translation :

"By him, the most devout worshipper of the Divine Ones, the Maharajadhiraja, the glorious Chandra Gupta II."

This shows that Chandra Gupta was a god-fearing man. As the image on the inscription is that of Lord Vishnu we can conclude that Chandra Gupta II was a devotee of Vishnu and this inscription was dedicated to him. The rest of the inscription is completely broken and cannot be deciphered.

SANCHI STONE INSCRIPTION OF CHANDRA GUPTA II

It was discovered at Sanchi (Bhopal) in 1834. It was erected sometime in 412-13 A.D. during the reign of Chandra Gupta II.

It is well preserved with the exception of a few letters which have been destroyed and cannot be read. It tells about the allotment of a piece of land and a small amount of money to the Buddhist monks by an officer of Chandra Gupta II for the maintenance of a religious place and for the subsistence of religious persons. It is not very important from the historical point of view. However, the discovery of this inscription proves that in spite of the fact that Chandra Gupta II was a Vaishnavite he was not only tolerant towards other sects but also helped them with gifts and donations.

The text and the translation of the inscription is as follows :—

Text :

(7 rān[||*]Ta [d-da] tta...... yād-arddhēna mahārājādhirāja-śri-Chandraguptasya Dēvarāja iti pri-

ya-nām.. .y tasya sarvva-guṇa-sampattayē yāvach=chandr-ādityau tāvat=pañcha bhikshavō bhumja-

tām ratna-grihē [cha di]pakō jvalatu [|*]mama ch=āpar-āraddhāt=pañch=aiva bhikshavō bhumjatām ratna-grihē cha

Translation :

"For perfection of all virtues of Chandra Gupta II, he decided that, from half of the interest of Dinaras, five Bhikshus should be fed and a lamp lit in the jewel-house till eternity, and with the other half, which is his (the officer who got it inscribed) share, the same number of 5 Bhikshus should be fed and a lamp kept burning in the jewel-house."

This line lays down the use to which the amount was to be put. The half of it (paid by Chandra Gupta II), was to be spent on the maintenance of five Bhikshus who would stay in the religious place and on the burning of a lamp. The other half, which was donated by that officer himself, who got this stone pillar erected, was to be set apart for the feeding of another 5 Bhikshus and the burning of another lamp in the "jewel house".

From the tenth line we gather something very interesting. It is most probably due to the fear of the Vaishnavites that the Buddhist monks wrote "that anybody who would interfere with this arrangement shall become invested with the slaughter of a cow or a Brahmin."

Another inscription has been found at Udyagiri which is known as Saiva inscription. It was also erected during the days of Chandra Gupta II and the object of this inscription was to record the excavation of the cave as a temple of the God Siva under the name of Sambhu by the order of Virasena, a minister of Chandra Gupta II.

Gadhwa Stone Inscription of Chandra gupta II and Kumara Gupta I

Of these two inscriptions, the stone inscription of Chandra Gupta II was discovered in 1871-72 and is preserved in the Imperial Museum at Calcutta. It is in Sanskrit and is in prose style. It gives us details of a gift of ten dinars given by Chandra Gupta II in charity to the Brahmin community.

Line 16 of this inscription is interesting. It states that anybody who shall interfere with the affairs of the Brahmin

community shall become invested with the five great sins. Among the ancient people fear of God was a very effective way of intimidating people and to keep them under law and order.

Similarly, the Gadhwa Stone Inscription of Kumara Gupta I gives us details of the two gifts of ten dinars each. It has nothing historical about it.

We also come across another inscription of Kumara Gupta from the same place. It is dated 417-18 A.D. and was discovered by Gen. Cunningham in 1880. It is in Sanskrit prose and like the other two inscriptions makes a mention of a gift of 12 dinars to the local community for the building of a charitable hall.

Bhilsad Stone Pillar Inscription of Kumara Gupta I

It was discovered in 1877-78 by Gen. Cunningham and is in Sanskrit. The first nine lines are written in prose while the rest of it is in verse. It is dated 415-16 A.D. and the main object of this inscription was to record the accomplishments of Dhruvasarman and to acquaint the people with his name as the builder of this charitable hall.

Bhitari Stone Pillar Inscription of Skanda Gupta

It was discovered at Bhitari in Ghazipur District in 1834 It is partly in prose and partly in verse. It is not dated. In the inscription too, which is in Sanskrit, there is no mention of any date. The purpose of this inscription was to record the installation of an image of Vishnu.

It also gives us the details of the achievements of Skanda Gupta. There is also a mention of his ancestors in the first five lines.

The text and the translation of the inscription is as follows :—

Text :

1. [Siddham] [||*] [Sar]vva-rā][ō]chchh[ē]ttuḥ pri-thivyām=a-pratirathasya chatur-udadhi-salil-[ā]svādita-yaśa-śo Dhanada-Varuṇ-Ēndr-[Ā]ntaka-sa[masya]

2. Kṛitānta-paraśōḥ nyāy-āgat-[ā]nēka-gō-hiraṇya-k[ō]ṭi-pradasya chir-ō[t]sannāśvamēdh-āharattur=mahārāja-śrī-Gupta-prapautra[sya]

3. mahārāja-śrī-Ghaṭōtkacha-pauttrasya mahārājādhi-rāja-śrīChandragupta-putrasya Lichchhivi-dauhitrasya mahā-dēvyām Kum[ā]rad[ē]vyā-

Translation :

"The glorious Samudra Gupta, the son of Maharajadhiraja, had attained perfection. He was the exterminator of all kings. There was none his equal in the world. His fame was spread to the shores of the four oceans. He was equal to the gods, Dhanada, Varuna, Indra and Antaka. He was the axe of the god Kritanta. He donated many millions of lawfully acquired cows and gold. He was the restorer of the Ashvamedha sacrifice which had long been in abeyance. He was the son of the son's son of the Maharaja Gupta, son's son of the illustrious Maharaja Ghatotkacha, son of the glorious Maharajadhiraja Chandragupta I, the daughter's son of the Lichchhavis from Mahadevi Kumara Devi."

These lines provide information on two very important points concerning Samudra Gupta. This description portrays his personality as a man and as a king. As a man he was equal to the gods, Dhanada, Varuna, Indra and Antaka. He perhaps possessed qualities which led the author to compare him to these divine beings, giving a latitude to exaggeration which is not uncommon in the panegyric records of the ancient Indian history. Even if he had in him some percentage of their qualities, it brings to our mind the picture of a man who was fearsome like Death luxurious and imperial like Indra, wealthy like Dhanada. He might not have given away "many millions" of cows

as donations in his religious zeal but it is symbolic of his spirit which was perhaps boundless. He was the follower of Brahmanism as the restorer of Ashvamedha sacrifice. It also shows that he was a great emperor. As a king he was perfect, a king of kings and an emperor.

The record point, which is of extreme importance from historical point of view, is the fixation of his relationship to his predecessors. It is clear that Sri Gupta, who was only a Maharaja, was his great-grand father, Ghatotkacha, also a Maharaja, his grand-father, and Maharajadhiraja Chandra Gupta I, his father. His mother, Kumara Devi, came of Lichchhavi stock. These details are corroborated by the information we obtain from other records.

Text:

4. m=utpannasya mahārājādhirāja-śrī-Samudragupta-sya putras = tat-parigṛihītō mahādēvyām = Dattadēvyām= utpannaḥ svayam=a-pratirathaḥ

Translation:

"He was the most devout worshipper of God. He nominated Chandra Gupta II, the glorious one, as his successor. The latter was his son from queen Mahadevi Dutta Devi and was himself unequalled in power."

This line only indicates that Chandra Gupta II, son of Samudra Gupta from queen Dutta Devi, was nominated as successor by Samudra Gupta. From other sources it is now generally accepted that the immediate successor of Samudra Gupta was Rama Gupta and not Chandra Gupta II. It has given rise to the presumption that perhaps the king's council ignored the wishes of the king and raised the elder brother of Chandra Gupta II to the throne. This point has been discussed elsewhere in detail and an effort has been made to resolve the controversy.

Text:

5. paramabhāgavatō mahārājadhirāja-śri-Chandraguptas =tasya putras=tat-pādānuddhyātō mahādēvyām Dhruvadēvyām=utpannaḥ parama-

Translation:

"His son was the most devout worshipper of the Divine One, Maharajadhiraja Kumara Gupta, the glorious one, who meditated oṅ his feet, son of Mahadevi Dhruva Devi."

This line continues the chronology of the dynasty. Kumara Gupta was the son of Chandra Gupta II from his queen Dhruva Devi. He was also a religious king. However, the exact significance of the words "meditated on his feet" is not understood. Perhaps he was very humble in his prayers. But this is only a guess; very broad one.

Text:

6 bhāgavatō mahārājādhir[ā]ja-śrī-Kumāraguptas= Tasya[|*] Prathita-prithu-mati-svabhāva-śaktēḥ prithu-yaśasah prithivīpatēh prithu-śrīh

pi[tri]-pa[r]igata-pādapadma vartti prathita-yaśāḥ prithīvipatiḥ sutō=yam [||*]
Jagati bhu[ja]-bal-āḍyō(dhyō) Gupta-vaṅś-aika-vīraḥ prathita-vipula-

Translation:

"He, who was the son of the king, well known for his innate intellectual powers was Skanda Gupta. He possessed great glory and remained like a bee on the wide-spread water lillies—the fame and achievement of his father. His fame spread far and wide and being endowed with much prowess, remained as the most conspicuous hero in the lineage of Guptas. His glory reached far and wide and good behaviour, emanating from the spotless soul, gave incentive

to those who performed good actions. Above all, he was well trained in the performance of musical keys."

This tells us about some of the qualities which Skanda Gupta possessed. It also bears witness to the qualities of head and heart for which his father, Kumara Gupta, was renowned. The author writes that Kumara Gupta was famous for his innate power and mighty intellect.

It has been stated that immediately after his accession Skanda Gupta concentrated his attention on the administration of the vast possessions he had inherited from his father, like a bee who always hovers over the water-lilies to keep them protected and specially reserved for itself. The Gupta empire was confronted by an incessant danger due to increasing infiltration of the Huns into the Indian territories. Skanda Gupta, therefore, had to make special efforts to keep the situation under control. By dint of his personal valour, prowess, courage and victories he became an important and famous figure in the history; his victory over the Huns being largely responsible for the spread of his fame to the farthest ends of the then known world. He has been described as the greatest among the Guptas for his warlike qualities.

It is stated that Skanda Gupta always encouraged the people to do good deeds and lead a life of good actions by personal example. He had a spotless soul and nothing could be said against his character or conduct. He was also an accomplished musician. The combination of all these qualities in him had made him known all over the world and people talked of him with respect and reverence.

Text :

8. dhāmā nāmataḥ Skandaguptaḥ sucharita-charitānām yēna vrittēna vrittam na vihatam=amal-ātmā tāna-dhidā(?)-vinītaḥ [||*] Vinaya-

bala-sunītair=vvikkramēṇa kkramēṇa pratidinam=abhiyōgād-īpsitam yēna la[b]dhvā svabhimata-vijigishā prōdyatānām parēshām praṇi-

Translation :

"By assiduous application of his strength, character and good behaviour, he achieved his end gradually, in the proper maintenance of his kingdom and subjugation of his enemies who had gathered for their long-cherished invasion."

This tells that Skanda Gupta did not harbour any impracticable or imaginary designs. He was not impatient or hasty in putting forward his plans to achieve his objectives. He seems to have a set programme which he accomplished by gradual application of his good behaviour and strength of character. These two qualifications went a long way to help him in the fulfilment of the mission of his life.

As we know it for certain, India during the later days of Kumara Gupta, father of Skanda Gupta, was confronted with an enemy of unparalleled strength, the Huns. Skanda Gupta was assigned the onerous task of protecting the borders from this savage invader. In the midst of these struggles Kumara Gupta passed away. The foreign invasion encouraged the rebellious elements within the country itself. Thus Skanda Gupta had to fight at two fronts. He was not disappointed or dismayed and did not turn into a tyrant by these continuous miseries. These qualifications helped him to subjugate his internal foes as well as to throw back the foreign invader with the same intensity with which it had entered the Indian territories.

From the study of this line we are in a position to solve the controversial point about the extent of success achieved by the rebels in India during the life-time of Skanda Gupta. It has been much debated by the historians without any final conclusion. It is evident that Skanda Gupta subjugated all the rebels in the country and maintained the political unity which had been disturbed during the later years of his father's reign.

Text 10 :

10. hita iva lē (bhē sa)mvidhān-ōpadēśaḥ [||*] Vichalita-kula-lakshmī-stambhanāy=ōdyatēna kshititala-śayanīyē yēna nītā triyāmā samu-

Translation :

"He spent a whole night on the bare earth in the preparation to restore the fallen fortunes of his dynasty. After conquering the Pushyamitras, who were very rich and powerful, he left the imprint of success deeply over the king of that tribe."

This line confirms our earlier statement. It bears witness to the rise of Pushyamitras during the later years of Kumara Gupta. The debased currency is another proof of these internal disturbances as the economic deterioration of the state could not be explained otherwise at such an early date except due to the excessive expenditure on the maintenance of the royal forces. We are also told that Skanda Gupta had to pass his nights several times on bare earth. We get many parallel examples of circumstances when other great rulers had to pass through still harder tests to retrieve their lost positions. He, however, remained determined and resolute and by his courage and self-confidence not only restored the fallen fortunes of his family, but also compelled the chief of the Pushyamitras, known for his wealth and power, to an unconditional surrender.

Text :

11. dita-ba[la]-kôshân=Pushyamitrâmś=cha [j] itvâ kshitipa-charana-pithê sthâpitô vâma-pâdaḥ[||*] Prasabham-anupam[ai]r=vvidhvasta-śâstra-pratâpai[r]=vina[. .] mu-

Translation :

"In every region, happy men down to children, used to sing about his spotless fame begotten by his cultured behaviour and heroism for which there was no parallel among his adversaries."

In this line Skanda Gupta has been paid a warm tribute, and has been amply rewarded for his inner and outer qualities.

He is described as a person with a very good behaviour and his fame has been described as spotless. In history we do come across such great warriors as won fame by their

victories in the battle-field. Their victories, however, always brought unknown sufferings to millions of human beings, and once they were victorious they lost their heads and became tyrants. This was not the case with Skanda Gupta. He has been called a man of very sober nature. With his qualities of great heroism he became an exceptional personality of his times. He was alive to the sanctity and value of a human life. That was perhaps one of the reasons why people held him in great respect and even children sang songs of his glory. He was the defender and saviour of the rich civilization and culture of India against the barbarism of Huns. But for the internal insurrections and foreign invasions Skanda Gupta would have gone down in history as a great patron of the men of art and learning.

Text :

12. [— —]kshānti-śaury[ai]r=nnirūḍhām charitam=amala-kirttēr=ggīyatē yasya śubhram diśi-diśi paritushtair=ā-kumāram manushyaiḥ [||*] Pitari divam=upē[tē]

viputām vaṅśa-lakshmīm bhuja-bala-vijit-ārir=yyaḥ pratishthāpya bhūyaḥjitam=iti paritōshān=mātaram sāsra-nēttrām hata-ripur=iva Kṛishṇō Dēvakīm=abhyupē-

Translation :

"When his father had gone to the Heavens, he restored the fallen fortunes of his dynasty by conquering his enemies by his own prowess and declared that 'the victory has been achieved'. Like Lord Krishna he appeared before his mother Devaki after vanquishing the enemies, whose eyes were filled with tears of joy at the achievement of her son."

This line, like the previous two, gives us a fair picture of the difficulties he inherited and the battles which he fought with his enemies immediately after the death of his father. We are told that he was victorious. A vivid scene has been drawn about his return after a victory and the reception which was accorded to him by his mother.

His mother received him with tears of joy. This scene has been compared with that of the return of Lord Krishna after killing his maternal uncle Kansa and his reception by his mother Devaki. In our ancient history Lord Krishna is an embodiment of all virtues and wisdom and the destroyer of the devilish forces. This simile presumably implies a war of righteousness which Skanda Gupta waged against the forces of barbarism and destruction. His mother was happy at his victory as it was a great blow to the savage forces which were determined to uproot the splendid culture of India. Skanda Gupta stood like a rock against these forces and offered a stubborn resistance to them.

Text :

14. [ta]ḥ [||*] Sv [ai]r=ddaṇḍ[aiḥ] [.] ra(?)tyu [. .] t-prachalitaṁ vaṁśam pratishṭhâpya yō bāhubhyam=avanīm vijitya hi jitēshv=ārttēshu kritvā dayām n=ōtsiktō [na] cha vismitaḥ pratidinaṁ

Translation :

"With his armies he firmly established his dynasty, which was tottering, but after the conquest, he was merciful to the conquered instead of being cruel and arrogant. This policy enhanced his fame and brought distinction for him, day after day, about which poets have sung well-deserved praises."

Here we find a mention of the fallen fortunes of his family and the re-establishment of the supremacy of the Guptas by the brave actions of Skanda Gupta in the battlefield. He can rightly be compared with Akbar although he was not so fortunate and most probably found his last resting place in the battlefield like a true warrior. For the greater part of his life he had to be on the horse-back. When assessing his greatness we should not forget that he was the solitary example in the world who successfully checked the onslaughts of the Huns for decades. At last he fell before the hordes who could not be resisted anywhere and before whom the grand Roman Empire tottered like a house of cards. It was not only the external foe whom he had to

meet but there were also the mighty Pushyamitras who required simultaneous attention. He really deserves our admiration for the patience and courage which he exhibited at this critical hour.

Perhaps great kings like Alexander or Napoleon would have found it difficult to tackle with such a situation and might have developed a spirit of vengeance under the circumstances. The treatment meted out to the Prussians by Napoleon after his victory at Jena and the massacre of the Persians by Alexander after his victory over them are the living examples of this spirit of revenge. Unlike these, Skanda Gupta showed mercy to the people of the conquered regions and saved them from further troubles which are normally in store for the fallen nations. He never grew into a tyrant or became arrogant after his victories. Rather, like Babur, he was satisfied with a passing reference of them in the historical records. He gained name and reputation day by day and his glories were sung by the bards. Further excavations and information about this king may perhaps enable us to write about his history more fully.

Text :

15. Saṁvarddhamāna-dyutiḥ gītaiś=cha stutibhiś=cha vandaka-ja(?)nō(?) yam prā(?)payaty=āryyatām[||*] Hūṇair=yyasya samāgatasya samarē dōrbhyām dharā kampitā bhīm-āvartta-karasya

Satrushu śarā [— — — — — — — —] — vira(?)chi(?)tam prakhyāpitō [—]i [—] na dyō(?)ti [—] nabhi(?)shu lakshyata iva śrōtrēshu Gāṅga-dhvaniḥ [||*]

Translation :

"When he came into close conflict with the Huns, it looked as if the whole earth was shaken and a terrible whirlpool was created. The enemy felt that the Ganges was roaring when the rain of arrows, from his side, darted through."

This line has portrayed a scene of the struggle between Skanda Gupta and the Huns. It was such a terrific struggle that the earth seemed to be trembling! When the two armies met each other, the arrows and other weapons of the Gupta army created such a terrific noise in the ear of the Huns as if the river Ganga was flowing in all its fury. It is not for the first time that we get such a comparison. River Jhelum showed its anger and fury when Alexander tried to march into the interiors of India. River Yamuna showed its fury and became flooded when Timur marched to Delhi.

Ganges, indeed, gets a privileged position among the Indian rivers and the comparison explains the havoc which the Indian army created among its enemies. The Huns were stunned with the shock of the tough opposition.

Text :

17. S[v]a-pituḥ kirtti [—— — — — — — — —— — —— — — —— —— — —— — —] [||*] — — —

[Karttavyā] pratimā kāchit=pratimām tasya Sārṅgiṇaḥ

s[u]-pratitaś=chakār=ēmām y[āvad=ā-chandra-tārakam [||*] Iha ch=ainam pratishthāpya su-pratishṭhita-śāsanaḥ gramam=ēnam sa vidadh[ē] pituḥ pu[ṇ]y-ābhivri-ddhayē [||*]

Atō bhagavatō mūrttir=iyam yaś=ch=ātra sams-thi(?)-ta(?)ḥ ubhayam nirddidēś=āsau pituḥ puṇyāya puṇya-dhīr=iti [||*]

Translation :

"To perpetuate the fame and to increase the religious merit of his father, he made the image of that Sarngin and installed the same in the village where his commands were well established."

It is mentioned that an image was installed at the village where it is found today. The main object of it was to spread the fame of his father both as a religious leader and as a philanthropist. The inscription is in a completely dilapi-

dated condition. The study of this inscription supplements the information that we gather from the coins of Skanda Gupta. It proves beyond doubt that the Huns, in spite of their repeated incursions in India, could not make much impression on the Indians and throughout the period of Skanda Gupta India remained a well-knit empire. No doubt people had a hard time but they were independent under a national government. The debased coins of Skanda Gupta clearly indicate that the vast resources of the Guptas were wasted in struggles with the Huns and the country passed through an economic crisis.

JUNAGADH ROCK INSCRIPTION OF SKANDA GUPTA

The credit for its discovery goes to James Prinsep who discovered this inscription in 1838 at Junagadh in Gujarat Kathiawar. Except for a few opening words the whole of the inscription is in verse. It is in Sanskrit and seems to have been inscribed in 455-56 A.D. It gives us detailed description of the bursting of lake Sudarshana due to excessive rain-fall. The dam was built up after a hard labour of two months. Except for a few lines, the inscription, on the whole, is not very important from the historical point of view. It speaks about the progress made by the Indians in Sanskrit poetry.

Text :

1 Siddham[||*] Sriyam=abhimata-bhōgyām naika-kāl-āpanitām tridaśapati-sukh-ārttham yō Balēr=ājahāra kamala-nilayanāyāḥ sāsvatam dhāma Lakshmyāḥ

Translation :

"Lakshmi, goddess of wealth and splendour, whose prepetual abode is water-lilly, was kept away from Indra, lord of gods, by the demon king Balli* for a long

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KING BALLI, THE SYMBOL OF GREAT SACRIFICE

King BALLI, the son of Virochan, and the grandson of the famous devotee, Prahlad, was one of the greatest saints of sacrifice of his times. The word "Balidan" had developed from his famous sacrifice. Balidan means entire sacrifice. King BALLI'S splendid administration on the earth

time. For the sake of the happiness of Indra, she was retrieved by Vishnu and thereby attaind perfection in victory over the evil."

This line has been written in praise of Vishnu, who, of the three gods, Vishnu, Siva and Brahma, has been given

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was acknowledged even by the gods and they accepted their defeat in competition with his matchless and bold Yogi-spirit of philanthropy and sacrifice.

ADITI, the divine mother of gods, could not stand the growing fame of king BALLI'S sacrifice on earth. She performed a great 'Yag' on the advice of her husband 'KASHAP' and procured Lord Vishnu in the form of a son in boon. This son manifested himself as 'WAMAN' an incarnation of God and appeared in the disguise of a Brahmin 'brahamcharya' in the 'YAG' performed by king BALLI and demanded merely three paces of land. King BALLI was so much fascinated by the sublime and ethereal form of WAMAN that he insisted him to demand more land or something better. 'WAMAN' refused to ask anything else but three paces of land only. King BALLI gave his free and whole-hearted consent to his demand and allowed him to measure land from any place or corner on earth in spite of being repeatedly forbidden by his great teacher Shukracharya from acceding to the wishes of the Brahmin.

WAMAN, the disguised Lord Vishnu, magnified himself tremendously to a size beyond imagination and calculation and measured out the entire land of his whole kingdom in two paces and could not find an inch of land to measure for the third pace. King BALLI lay himself prostrate at the feet of the Almighty Lord and asked Him to measure his body for the third pace. The Gracious Lord placed His Divine foot over BALLI'S head, made over his kingdom to Indra the ruler god of Heaven and granted the reign of the lower world 'Patal' to BALLI. He allowed BALLI to visit his old kingdom once in a year, which event is even now celebrated in Southern parts of India.

Some writers, however, are of the opinion that Lord Vishnu was so much happy with King BALLI that he promised to bestow upon King BALLI the 'Indrasan' for one kalap (full four yugs) after Indra had completed his tenure of another forty Ashvamedha, (sixty being lost by him by his conjugal relations with the consort of Gautam) and He made good his promise. However, for the time being King BALLI was to be contented only with Patal, the lower world. Meanwhile Lord Himself undertook the duties of a gatekeeper of BALLI'S royal palace. This is how the Lord of Lords of three worlds bestowed His supreme benevolence upon King BALLI.

The story further goes that Lakshmi on hearing of Lord Vishnu's taking up the duty of a gate-keeper of King BALLI in 'Patal' hastened to 'Patal' to bring back Vishnu to Heaven. Lord Vishnu explained to her the promised boon wherein He had agreed to work as a gate-keeper of King BALLI.

Lakshmi then went to King BALLI and tied Sacred thread around his arm and asked for Vishnu as a boon. King BALLI agreed and for the counter boon which he expected as a brother from Lakshmi it was agreed upon that Lord Vishnu will stay in heaven for eight months and for the other four months of the year he will stay with King BALLI.

We thus find that 'Lakshmi' which in fact means prosperity, was restored to Indra by Lord Vishnu, of which he was being deprived by the demon King, BALLI, through his austerity and benevolence.

the top-most position. The line gives a brief description of the famous ancient myth about how Vishnu came to the rescue of Lord Indra, the lord of gods when the latter was outwitted by Bali and deprived of Lakshmi and other pleasures and was made miserable. Brahma is known as the Creator, Siva as the Destroyer and Vishnu as the Preserver. The last always looks after the comforts of all and is ready to help the distressed people. This line describes how Vishnu came to the rescue of Indra and not only retrieved the wealth and splendour from Balli, the demon king, but also humbled him to such an extent as left him with only the lower regions below the earth.

The legend goes that when Balli left nothing with Indra, the latter in distress went to Vishnu and prayed for his help. Vishnu, in the guise of a young lad, approached Balli and asked for land equal to his three steps. The latter did not understand the trick and agreed to part with that much of space. Vishnu with two steps took away the heaven and the earth. Bali lost nerves and fell at his feet and Vishnu took pity on him so as to leave him with the lower regions below the earth. Lakshmi who had her abode in the water-lilly was thus restored to Indra.

Text 2:

sa jayatı vijit-ārttir=vvishnur=atyanta-jishṇuh Tad =anu jayatı Sāśvat śri-parikshipta-vakshāḥ svabhuja-janita-viryō rājarājādhirājah | narapati-

bhujagānām mana-darpp-ōtphaṇānām pratikṛiti-Garuḍ-ājñā[m] nirvvishi[m] ch=āvakarttā || Nripati-guna-nikētah Skandaguptah pṛithu-śrih chaturudadhi-ja(?)l(?)-āntām sphita-paryanta-dēsām |

avanim=avanat-ārir=yaḥ chakār=ātma-samsthām pitari sura-sakhitvam prāptavaty=ātma-śaktyā || Āpi cha jitam =[ē]va tēna prathayamti yaśāmsi yasya ripavō=pi āmūla-bhagna-darpā niva. Mlechchha-dēśeshu ||

Translation :

"With his perpetual victories, he remained the supreme king of kings, always embraced by goddess Lakshmi and thereby blessed with wealth and splendour. His local chieftains proved as Garudas to curb down the hood of pride and arrogance of the serpent-like adversaries. When his father attained friendly position with gods, he, the embodiment of all kingly qualities, subjugated the whole of the earth bounded by the four oceans and bordered by thriving countries. Even the pride of his enemies, in the countries of the Mlechchhas, was broken down to the roots, who announced : "Verily the victory has been achieved by him". After careful consideration of all virtues and faults, right decision was arrived at by goddess of fortune and splendour to select him as her husband and thereby to dismiss other sons of the king being of lower standards."

This is perhaps the most important line of this inscription from the historical point of view. It tells us about the political and economic situation prevailing under Skanda Gupta. It needs a critical elaboration as some of its points conflict with the information known through other sources.

It has been stated that Skanda Gupta was always victorious in the battle-field. Through these victories he won for himself the supreme position of a king of the kings. By his valour and courage he deprived other rulers of their independence. His local chiefs acted as a great bulwark against the power of such insolent adversaries as tried to harm his position. The author tells us further that Skanda Gupta, due to his great qualities, had won over the friendship of gods. His empire extended as far as the four oceans. It embraced the whole of Northern India.

The country was passing through very prosperous circumstances and had become talk of the day in the neighbouring countries. Skanda Gupta was selected by the goddess of wealth as her spouse from amongst many rival candidates. He was, without a fault and an embodiment of many virtues. His prowers of arms was acknowledged by his neighbour Mlechcha rulers, as is clear from the remark : "Verily the victory has been achieved by him".

The statement in respect of prosperity may not appeal to a critical mind especially when the king had to debase the coins due to the economic bankruptcy of the state. The country being exposed to the ravages of the Huns quite frequently, there was no question of prosperity of its people. Rather, it would be more appropriate to say that trade and commerce received a setback and the period, which a few decades ago, was known as a glorious period in Indian history, became a dream for the people, a thing of the past.

Text :

5 Kramēna buddhyā nipuṇam pradhārya dhyātva cha kritsnān=guṇa-dōsha-hētūn | vyapētya sarvān=manujēndra-putrām=llakshmīḥ svayam yam varayām=chakāra || Tasmin =nripē śāsati n=aiva kaśchid=dharmmād=apētō manujaḥ prajāsu |

Translation :

"During his regime, nobody deviated from his religious duties, nobody was in distress, poverty or misery. There was no avarice or torture in place of normal punishment."

From this line it is evident that Skanda Gupta took a keen interest in the administration. The author writes that so long as Skanda Gupta ruled, none of his subjects was ever forgetful of daily religious prayers. Skanda Gupta correctly saw the importance of religion as a great factor for overcoming the disappointments and disgust caused by the failures in the day-to-day life. He realised the religion as a source of inspiration to the people to do good deeds in spite of their poverty.

There was none in the country who was poor or distressed. There was also none who went unpunished after committing an act which was punishable. This needs a critical examination. We know that the times of Skanda Gupta were not as glorious as those of his predecessors. We can agree with the author that he maintained a great discipline and personally looked after the morale of the people. But for a strict control, vigilance and a personal supervision

of the life of the nation, it would have been difficult for him to meet serious incursions from the Huns Leaders, who had created a terror and feeling of insecurity everywhere by constantly knocking at the gates of India to have an access into the interior of the country. We can also agree with the author that so great was the fear of the Gupta ruler that justice always prevailed and none could oppress the weak. However, it is difficult to reconcile ourselves with the theory that there was no poverty or misery and that the country on the whole presented a glorious picture. To restore the lost prosperity was not possible, although the warlike Skanda Gupta did restore the fallen fortunes of his family. It was the continued incursions of the Huns into India that perhaps did not allow Skanda Gupta to enjoy even a single year of peace throughout his reign. Again and again he had to organise fresh armies and his life was spent in the saddle. The royal treasury grew empty. The revolts of the Pushyamitras further drained his resources and the country on the whole did not present such a glorious picture as has been painted.

Text 6 :

ārttō daridrō vyasanī kadaryō daṇḍ[yō*] na vā yō bhṛiśa-pīḍitaḥ syāt || Evam sa jitvā pṛithivīm samagrām bhagn-āgra-darpā[n] dvishataś=cha kṛitvā | sarvvēshu dēśēshu vidhāya gōptṛi(ptṛī)n samchintayā[m-ā]sa bahu-prakāram || Syāt=kō=nurūpō

matimān=vini(nī)tō mēdhā-smṛitibhyām=anapēta-bhāvaḥ | saty-ārjav-audārya-nay-ōpapannō mādhuryadākshiṇya yaśō-nvitaś=cha || Bhaktō=nuraktō nṛiv[i] ś[ē]sha-yuktaḥ sarvv-ōpādhābhiś=cha viśuddha-buddhiḥ | ānṛiṇya-bhāv-ōpa gat-āntarātmāḥ sarvvasya lōkasya hitē pravṛittaḥ ||

Nyāy-ārjanē=rthasya cha kaḥ samarthaḥ syād=arjitasy=āpy=athā rakshaṇē cha| gōpāyitasy=āpi[cha] vṛid-dhi-hētau vṛiddhasya pātra-pratipādanāya || Sarvvēshu bhrityēshv=api samhatēshu yō mē praśishyān=nikilān=Surāshṭrān | ām jñātam=ēkaḥ khalu Parṇadattō bhārasya tasy=ōdvahanē samarthaḥ ||

Ēvam viniśchitya nṛip-ādhipēna naikān=ahō-rātra-gaṇañ=sva-matyā | yaḥ samniyuktō=rthanayā kathamchit samyak=Surāshṭr-āvani-pālanāya || Niyujya dēvā Varuṇam pratīchyām svasthā yathā n=ōnmanasō babhūvu[ḥ] (|) pūrv-vetarasyam diśi Parṇadattam niyujya rājādhṛitimāms=tath=ābhūt | (||)[1]

Tasy=ātmajō hy=ātmaja-bhāva-yuktō dvidh=ēva ch=ātm=ātma-vaśēna nītaḥ | sarvvātman=ātm=ēva cha rakshaṇīyō nity-ātmavān=ātmaja-kāntarūpaḥ | (||) Rūp-ānurūpair=lalitair=vichitraiḥ nitya-pramōd-ānvita-sarva-bhāvaḥ | prabhuddha-padmākara-padmavaktrō nṛiṇām śaraṇyaḥ śaraṇāgatānām | (||)

Abhavad=bhuvi Chakrapālitō=sāv=iti nāmnā prathitaḥ priyō janasya | sva-guṇair=an-upaskritair=udātti [ai]ḥ pitaram yaś=cha viśēshayām=chakāra | (||) Kshamā prabhutvam vinayō nayaś=cha śauryam vinā śaurya-mah-[ā?] rchchanam cha | vā(?)kya(?)m damō dānam=adīnatā cha dākshiṇyam=ānṛiṇyam=aś(ū) nyatā cha | (||) Saumdaryam =āryētara-nigrahaś=cha a-vismayō dhairyam=udīrṇatā cha | ity=ēvam=ētē= tiśayēna yasminn=a - vipravāsēnā guṇā vasanti | (||) Na vidyatē=sau sakalē=pi lōkē yatr= ōpamā tasya guṇaiḥ kriyēta | sa ēva kārtsnyēna guṇ-ānvitānām babhūva nṛi(nri)ṇām=upamāna-bhūtaḥ | (||) Ity= ēvam = ētān = adhikān = atō = nyān = guṇān = par[ī] kshya svayam=ēva pitrā | yaḥ samniyuktō nagarasyā rakshām viśishya pūrvān=prachakāra samyak | (||)

Āśritya vi(vī)ryam su(?)-bhu(?)ja(?)-dvayasya svasy=aiva n=ānyasya narasya darpam | n=ōdvējayām-āsa cha kamchid=ēvam=asmin=purē ch=aiva śa śāsa dushṭaḥ(n) | (||) Visrambham=alpē na śa śāma yō=smin kālē na lōkēshu sa-nāgarēshu | yō lālayām=āsa cha paura-vargān [— —] putrān=su-parīkshya dōshān | (||) Samramjayam cha prakṛitīr=babhūva pūrvasmitābhāshaṇa-māna-dānaiḥ |

niryantraṇ - ānyōnya - griha - pravēsai[h*] samvard-dhita-priti-grih-ōpachāraiḥ | (||) Brahmanya-bhāvēna parēṇa yuktaḥ śaklaḥ śuchir=dana-parō yathāvat | prāpyān=Sa kālē vishayān=sishēvē dharm-ārthayōś=ch=ā [py=a*]-virō-dhanēna | (||) Yō [— — —] Parṇadattāt=sa nyāyavān=atra kim=asti chitram | (||)muktākalāp- āmbuja-padma-śitāch=chandrāt=kim=ushṇam bhavitā kadāchit | (||)

Translation :

"After having annihilated all his adversaries, he conquered the whole earth and appointed protectors in all the countries. For administration of the countries he selected persons endowed with intellect, modesty, wisdom, truth, straightforwardness, nobility and discretion. They should possess sweetness, civility, fame, loyalty, affection and manly characteristics. They should be persons whose mental calibre has been trained and who had been found pure in all the tests of honesty. They should have the inner soul and natural bias for acquittance of debts and obligations. Their mind should be preoccupied with the thought of the welfare of all mankind—be capable of lawful acquisition, proper preservation and necessary augmentation of wealth which should be expended for worthy causes. All my countries including Saurashtra will be governed on these principles and in Parnadatta he got the just man, competent to bear all these burdens".

After the conquest of the whole country and complete subjugation of his enemies Skanda Gupta took upon himself the onerous task of the appointment of suitable governors and officers in the different parts of his territories. To conquer a country is not so difficult as it is to maintain efficient government in the newly conquered territory. Skanda Gupta was well conversant with this principle and spared no pains to provide the best men in the conquered regions to restore their prosperity which had received a setback due to the change of ruler. Skanda Gupta has been praised for his knack of selecting the right men for these posts. He would otherwise have to face

disappointment and failure like Humayun who selected an inexperienced and raw governor like Askari for Gujarat after its conquest, giving more weightage and consideration to his relationship over the competence of other candidates, thus losing the ripe apple of Gujarat as easily as he had plucked it.

Skanda Gupta never allowed anybody to influence his judgment in this respect and he always selected persons who combined in themselves the best qualities of head and heart. They were not only to be intelligent but were also to be straightforward, simple, truthful and good counsellors, amenable to discipline. It was also very essential for them to be the scions of respectable, cultured, noble, brave and well-known families whose integrity, loyalty, sincerity, manly characteristics, honesty and purity had been tested and who had a well-known record of public dealings. They were always to be the best-behaved persons and of a very sweet disposition. They were to be cultured, and civilised and possess a very affectionate nature. They were to be courageous and resolute, impossible to be influenced in their judgment : Who did not falter or felt nervous when confronted with unexpected or untoward important event or problem. They were to have many qualities and, when for their hard work, promoted in rank or pay, they would not lose their head and ignore or lose sight of their sacred liabilities as servants of the state. A man, says the author, who combined all these qualities in himself was Parnadatta, who had been appointed by Skanda Gupta, as his governor of Saurashtra. He had gone through all these tests and was exceptional among his servants.

Text :

15 Athā kramēn=āmbuda-kāla Āgat(ē) n(i)dāgha-kālam pravidārya tōyadaiḥ | va varsha tōyam bahu saṁtatam chiram Sudarśanaṁ yēna bibhēda ch=ātvarāt | (||) Saṁvat-sarāṇām=adhikē śatē tu triṁśadbhir=anyair=api shadbhir=ēva | rātrau dinē Praushṭhapadasya shashthē Gupta-prakālē gaṇanām vidhāya | (||)

Imās=cha yā Raivatakād=vinirgatā[ḥ*] Palāśin=iyam sikatā-vilāsinī |samudra-kāntāh chira-bandhan-ōshitāḥ punah patim śāstra-yathōchitam yayuḥ | (||) Avēkshya varsh-āgama-jam mah-ōbhramam mah-ōdadhēr=Ūrjayatā priy-ēpsunā | anēka-tīrāntaja-pushpa-śōbhitō

Translation :

"Then gradually came the season of "Varsha" with the sky overcast with clouds and dispelled the scorching heat of "Grisham". The relentless rain for a long time caused the bursting of the lake Sudarshana, which occurred, according to the Guptas, in a century and thirty six years, at night on the sixth day of the month of Pranshthapada".

In this line we find a mention of a very grim event which was nothing short of a national calamity i.e., the bursting of Lake Sudarshana due to excessive rainfall. Lake Sudarshana is mentioned for the first time in the Mauryan records. Prosperity of Gujarat-Kathiawar depended on this lake to a great extent. The author in this line tells us that never before such a type of calamity befell upon people as far back as their memory went and it was to a great extent responsible for giving a setback to their plans and schemes.

Text :

17 Nadīmayō hasta iva praśāritaḥ | (||) Vishādya [mānāh]khalu sarvatō ja]nāḥ katham-katham kāryam=iti pravādinaḥ | mithō hi purv-āpara-rātram=utthitā vichintayām ch=āpi babhūvur=utsukāḥ | (||) Ap=iha lōkē sakalē Sudarśanam pumām(n) hi durdarśanatām gatam kshaṇāt |

bhavēn=nu a-āmbhō nidhi-tulya-darśanam su-darśanam [— — — -- -- — — — ——] vanē sa bhūtvā pituh parām bhaktim=api pradarsya dharmam purō-dhāya śubh-ānu-bandham rājñō hit-ārtham nagarasya ch=aiva | (||) Sam-vatsarāṇām=adhikē śatē tu

trimśadbhir=anyair=api saptabhiś=cha pra[ ]
śāstra-chēttā vi(?)svō(?)=py=anu jñāta-mahā-prabhāvaḥ | (||) Ājya-pranamaih vibudhān=ath=ēshṭvā dhanair=dvijātin=api tarpayitvā | paurāms=tath=ābhyarchya yathārha-mānaiḥ bhrityāmś=cha pūjyan=suhṛi-daś=cha dānaih | (||)

Graishmasya māsasya tu pūrva-pa kshē [
pra] thamē=hni samyak | māsa-dvayēn=ādaravān=sa bhūtvā dhanasya kritvā vyayam=a-pramēyam | (||) Āyāmatō hasta-śatam samagram vistāratah shashṭir=ath=āpi ch=āshtau |

utsēdhatō=nyat purushāni sa(?)pta(?) [ha] sta-śata-dvayasya | (||) Babandha yatanān=mahatā ṛridēvān =[abhyarchya(?)] samyag-ghaṭitōpalēna | a-jāti-dushtam=prathitam taṭākam Sudarśanam śaśvata-kalpa-kālam | (||)

Api cha sudriḍha-sētu-prānta(?)-vinyasta-śobha-rathacharana-samāhva-kraumcha-hamś-āsa-dhūtam | vimala-salila [— — — — — — — — —] bhuvi ta-

[—— —]da [-a]rkaḥ śaśicha | (||)

Nagaram=api cha bhūyād=vṛiddhimat=paura-jush tam dvija-bahu-śata-gita-brahma-nirnashṭa-pāpam | śatam=api cha samānām=iti-durbhikhsa [— —— — —— ——— — — — ———] [||] [Iti Suda]rśana-taṭāka-samskāra-gramtha-rachanā [sa]māptā ||

Translation :

"In a moment, Sudarshana presented an unpleasant and awful appearance to all the people, who thereupon became despondent, thinking in great anxiety the whole night, what they should do in this calamity."

In this line the author describes the non-plussed condition of the people who lived around the Lake and whose prosperity depended on it. They were disappointed. They

could not sleep at night and discussed their future course of action. But they were unable to think of any way to meet this. They were all the more troubled as they had always regarded the lake as a symbol of their prosperity and happiness and had never experienced or seen such a calamity earlier due to the lake.

Text :

24, Dript-âri-darpa-pranudaḥ pṛithu-śriyaḥ sva-vanśa-kētōḥ sakal-âvani-patēḥ | râjâdhirâjy- âdbhuta-puṇya-[karmanaḥ] [— — -— — — — —— ——] [—— ——— — — — — —] [|]dvipasya gōptâ mahatâm cha nētâ daṇḍa dvi(?) [—]nâm

Translation :

"He who destroyed the pride of his haughty adversaries and became lord of the whole earth, gloriously hoisted high the banner of his dynasty. He, by his pious deeds, remained more conspicuous than by his supreme sovereignty over kings".

In this line we again come across praise of Skanda Gupta for his subjugation of those enemies who were very proud of their power and had lost their heads. Skanda Gupta by his achievements raised the prestige and position of his dynasty, so much so that the author of this inscription calls him 'The banner of his lineage'. He had conquered all his enemies. By his good deeds he carved out for himself a position as the Supreme Sovereign of the land. Kings in history win laurels either in the field of battle or in the field of reforms and works of public welfare. Skanda Gupta, as we are told by the author of this inscription, won name in both the fields.

Besides the above we come across two other inscriptions of Skanda Gupta which have been discovered at Kahaum and Indore. These are not very important from the historical point of view. These inscriptions, which are more or less of a religious character, relate to some donations made on behalf of the government.

ERAN STONE PILLAR INSCRIPTION OF BUDHA GUPTA

It was discovered by Captain T.S. Burt at Eran in 1838. It is in Sanskrit—partly in verse and partly in prose. It gives details of Budha Gupta and one of his feudatory chiefs named Maharaja Sura Smichandra who was ruling over the country between the Yamuna and the Narbada. It seems to have been installed in 484-5 A.D. Its object was to record the erection of a flag-staff of Vishnu. In the last line we come across the following words :—

"Let all the subjects be prosperous—headed by cows and Brahmans".

From the study of this inscription it becomes clear that Hinduism was still the state religion.

MANDASOR STONE INSCRIPTION OF KUMARA GUPTA

It was discovered at Mandasor in Western Malwa, in 1886. It was installed during the days of Kumara Gupta and from the existence of this inscription we can conclude that the Gupta empire extended as far as Malwa during the days of Kumara Gupta.

Herein the story of the migration of some silk-weavers has been narrated which is of not much help to the students of history. However, some of its lines paint the true picture of the guild system as it existed in those days in Western India and the progress which the silk industry had made. We are also told that Bandhuvarman was governing this region. He was a vassal of Kumara Gupta. The main object of this inscription was to record the repair of a temple which was in a dilapidated condition.

From the study of the above epigraphic records it can be said that inscriptions are an important source of the Gupta history. Not only do they supplement our informa-

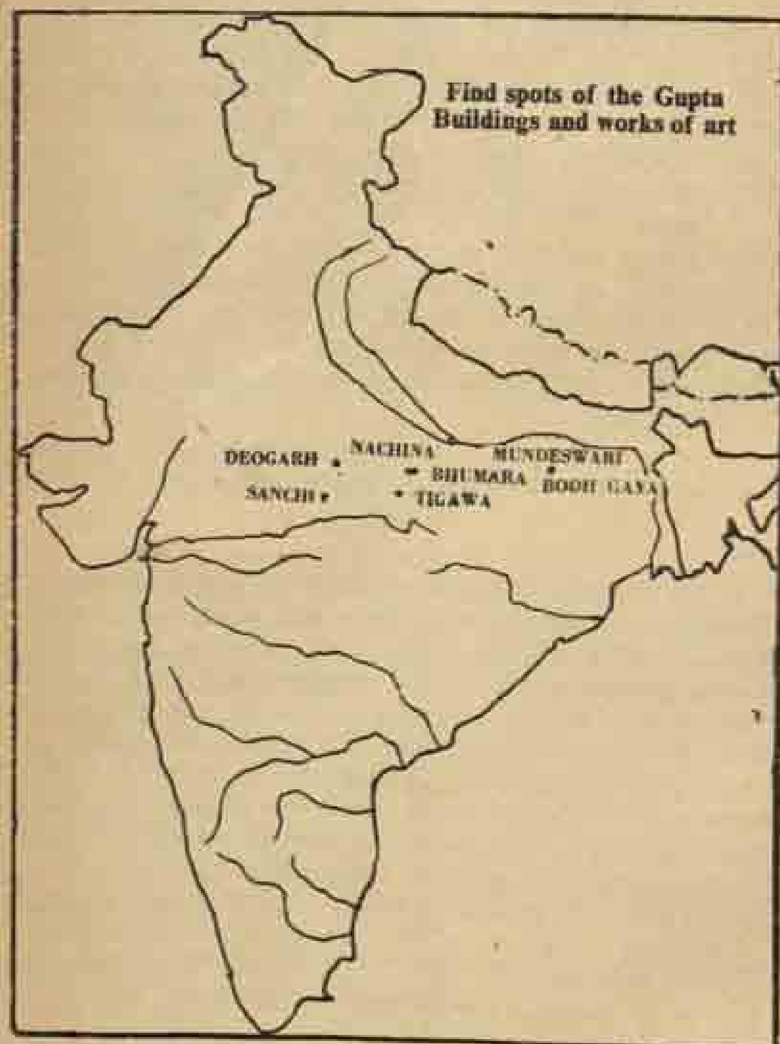
tion at places but sometimes are the only dependable source from which we can reconstruct some of the valuable historical events in the Gupta history. The Guptas do not seem to have taken much interest in the installation of these inscriptions. Majority of these which have come down to us had actually been installed by their feudal chiefs. The information we gather from them has been challenged at places by historians. They feel that there is exaggeration in these. However, their comparative study with other historical records helps us in getting a true picture of India of those times. With their help we can estimate the extension of an empire and from inscriptions like the Allahabad Pillar we can build up even the complete history of a king. From some others, religion of the ruler becomes known and from still others the economic conditions of the period can be depicted for which, otherwise, we have very scanty material at our disposal.

6. OLD CITIES, BUILDINGS AND WORKS OF ART

The Imperial Guptas have left behind a large number of buildings, monuments, and other works of art besides some cities which flourished under their patronage. Samudra Gupta resided at places like Ayodhya and Eran besides Patliputra. Chandra Gupta II shifted his seat of government to Ujjain and is popular in historical legends as 'Vikramaditya of Ujjain'. Fahien testifies to the fact that there were many important cities like Kanauj, Mathura, Taxila, Nalanda, Patliputra, etc. through which he passed in the course of his journey. Majority of these cities were buried under the ground, a few of which have been excavated through the efforts of the Archaeological Department. We can build up a sketch of the greatness of the Imperial Guptas by making a critical study of their ruins.

Kanauj was a seat of Hindu culture and civilisation. In the later times it became much more important and was capital of Harsha. Mathura was famous for its temples and was a sacred place of Hindus. It was also renowned as a

centre of Sanskrit learning and the research in the Vedas, Upnishadas etc. Taxila and Nalanda were seats of residential universities. In the days of Harsha, Nalanda became



the world-famous centre of Buddhist learning and Hiuen Tsang studied there for several years. In these universities students studied various subjects, including religious litera-

ture, both Buddhist and Brahmanical. Patliputra was the seat of the Mauryas and the Guptas. The palace of Chandragupta in it excited the admiration of the Greeks, who declared that even the palaces of the great kings of Persia in Susa and Ekbatana could not vie with it.

The Imperial Guptas were very much interested in the development of different arts. They were cultured and enlightened sovereigns. They, therefore, patronised all such activities as led to the advancement of their people. They were true Indians and are accredited with the establishment of a truly national government. They looked at the interests of the country from a national angle with the true spirit of patriotism. They tried their utmost to raise their country as well as the government to the pinnacle of glory in the eyes of the world and won for themselves and their country an enviable position in history.

A respite from the foreign invaders and internal peace and security were the factors which helped them to devote their energies and attention to the development of different arts. It was a period of assimilation and integration rather than revolution and conflict. This age has variously been compared for its glorious aspects with the Periclean age of Athens, the glorious reigns of Elizabeth I and Victoria and the Augustan age of Rome. During this period various artistic trends and traits of the preceding phases culminated into a unified tradition of supreme and unique import in the history of Indian art.

Painting and sculpture not only reached their perfection but also found naturalness of expression. Never before was noticed such a great harmony between art and thought, between the outer form and the inner spirit as we come across during this period. Gandhara school of art pales into insignificance when compared with the three different schools of art which flourished during this period at Mathura, Benaras and Patliputra. Indian thought and ideologies were never before, or even afterwards, depicted better than in the sculptures, paintings and terracotas of this period. We find not only maturity, which is unfortunately missing in the

earlier sculptures and paintings,but also balance and restraint of Kushan sensuality in expression and exhibition. The painters of that period have reproduced the imagination of poets, dramatists and writers successfully and with clarity. It was only in the Gupta period that India attained true perfection in the art of sculpture and painting. Finishing touches to these works of art have been given so thoroughly and minutely by the master hands of the sculptors that the impression of the images is sufficient for us to understand what they stood for and what they intended to convey. This is particularly true in the representation of the facial expressions and the carving out of the different parts of the body. Dr. Radha Kamal Mukerjee has compared the clarity and poise of the images of the Buddha, Siva, Vishnu, the angels and river goddesses, with the balance and rhythm of classical Sanskrit poetry of the word.

The Gupta art can be distinguished from other schools of art, which flourished earlier, in its 'refinement, elegance, simplicity of expression, and dominant spiritual purpose'. It does not represent any foreign characters. Hindu gods like Vishnu, Karttikeya, Surya, Durga, Ganga and Yamuna have been represented in terracotta, unlike the Greek gods and goddesses and Greek influence found in the specimens of earlier art. The Gupta artist transformed what he touched. These distinctive qualities give Gupta art its own individuality.

The Gupta art was based on the ancient themes and the Gupta artist got inspiration from the ancient traditions. This accounted for its popularity in the country and in this lay the real secret of its inspiring vitality. Mr. Codrington remarks correctly, that "Gupta art has been praised for its intellectuality. It would be better to treat Gupta art as the natural outcome of the ancient pattern and its love of quick beat and rhythm of living things and of their poise and balance in repose."

The Gupta artistic activities were inspired by the high intellectual consciousness of the age. We thus observe

that behind every sculpture and painting of that age there is some very significant meaning or a story of the age. This unfortunately is lacking in the earlier works of art. These paintings and sculptures are important historical sources of information for the history of that period.

Another admirable feature of the Gupta sculpture is that here we find the religious element more pronounced than sensuousness which is dominant in the Kushan sculpture. Serenity of Buddha, grandeur of Vishnu and charm of Parvati were never depicted better in the history of Indian art. A tourist can enjoy a scene drawn by a Gupta painter better than a reader who goes through its description in the works of Kalidasa. A master-sculptor and a master-painter of that period are thus to be given more credit than even a writer and poet of that age because the ideas and imaginations of the latter would never have been understood so clearly as we can do today in the absence of paintings and sculptures of the former.

The Gupta art attaches special importance to the human beings. Unlike in the earlier period, human figure finds the most unique position and all other objects are subordinated to it. Even nature has been assimilated so thoroughly with this tendency that it tends to become a part of it. That is why we find the Gupta paintings more attractive, historically important and natural in their outlook. Unlike the ancient European religious paintings, the Gupta artist has represented the different gods and goddesses as full of energy and vitality. Their mental and physical control shines forth in their calm and spiritual expressions. The Gupta artist seems to be highly experienced, having a deeper realisation of the hard fact that only a healthy body could contain a healthy mind.

The different poses into which the figures have been shown depict the gestures and moods. They also acquaint us with the circumstances under which the particular figure came to assume a particular pose. At Bodh Gaya where Buddha was enlightened we find him in a seated posture. This tells about his steadfast nature. From this pose we can

understand that Buddha at that time was determined to sacrifice himself and had taken that vow 'Let all my bones be wasted away : I will not budge a single inch from this place until I attain Nirvana'. After his enlightenment Buddha went to Sarnath to make the people acquainted with the real truth. Here he has been represented with his 'two hands held near the breast, the right turned outwards, with the thumbs and the fore-fingers joined and the remaining fingers touching those of the other hand'. Rene Grousset thus writes about mudras: "Never, indeed, has the spiritual value of the hands—those flowers of the flesh, which held in their chalice the whole of human tenderness and thought —been comprehended with such mystical insight. For the gesture known as Dhyana Mudra symbolises the peace and concentration of mind taught by the Buddhism. The whole of the Blessed One's power of gentleness is revealed in the Abhaya Mudra. What calm assurance there is in the gesture by which he takes the earth as his witness; what supreme elegance—the finished grace of reason in the perfect sage—in the gesture of discussion and of the Dharma Chakra".

An important feature of the Gupta art is the similarities given to the different parts of the body with the different objects of nature. We find similar comparison made by Kalidasa in his writings. The face has been compared with an egg in its smoothness and oval shape, forehead with the bow, and nose with the beak of a parrot. Neck has been likened to conch-shell, chest and waist to those of a lion, shoulders in their broadness to the head of the elephant and hands and feet to lotus flowers. From these we can safely conclude that the people of that age understood the correct definition of beauty and were experienced enough to explain it by these means.

The Gupta art was tinged with the spirit of religion. We thus find the best specimens of the Gupta sculpture preserved in the ancient Brahmanical temples, and the Buddhist and Jain monasteries. In spite of the fact that the Guptas were the followers of Hinduism and majority of their rulers were the devotees of Vishnu they were tolerant towards

other religions. Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism, therefore, flourished side by side and this harmony among the different religions had a great stimulating effect on the growth and development of art. Unfortunately, most of the religious places of the Gupta period, which contained some rare specimens of their art, fell a prey to the foreign invaders. Some of them crumbled down by the ravages of time. Some of the structures which contain works of art are as follows :

1. Buddhist monasteries at Sanchi and Bodh Gaya.
2. Hindu temples at Mundeswari.
3. Parvati temple at Nachna-Kuthara in Ajayagarh territories.
4. Siva temple at Bhumara.
5. Later Gupta temples at Deogarh in Jhansi District in Uttar Pradesh.
6. Vishnu temple at Tigawa.

The Buddhist monastery at Bodh Gaya, which testifies to the liberality of Samudra Gupta in his religious views, has been described by Fahien as a splendid monastery, with six halls, and three lofty towers, surrounded by a wall thirty or forty feet high. Myths and legends have been depicted in the Deogarh temple. There are several scenes from the lives of Krishna and Rama. The description of the cowherds of Gokula, Sudama, Pandavas, Rama, Sita, Lakshmana, Ahalya and Sarupnakha has been rendered with a wonderful simplicity, vigour and delicacy.

The Gupta art flourished at three centres af art, Mathura, Benaras and Patliputra. The Mathura school inherited some features, as well as style, of the Kushan art. The Benaras school, however, was of a more progressive nature. The artists of this school do not seem to have been attracted by the Kushan art. They had their independent outlook and seem to have influenced the Patliputra school of art. These places were particularly known for the plastic art. The plastic masterpiece which may be quoted as a representative is the Buddha seated in Dhyana Mudra at Anuradhapura. The lofty Mathura figure of the Buddha has been described by R.K. Mukerjee as one of the world's

most significant symbols of man's moral and intellectual glory. Many other specimens of plastic art have been found at Mathura, Sarnath and Madhyadesa but they are inferior to the one referred to above.

The paintings of Ajanta caves are of special interest and importance in their successful maintenance of a balance between earthly and spiritual objects. They are the specimens of the perfection of art of painting. Among the best specimens of pictures which we come across in these paintings are the blind hermit parents with their child, the meeting of Buddha, after his enlightenment, with his wife Yasodhara and son, Rahula and a trembling woman touching the feet of king when punished by the latter.

From what is stated above we can conclude that the Imperial Gupta period was a period of hectic development in different aspects of art. India experienced the most glorious period in the artistic field. The paintings at Ajanta and Gwalior, and plastic and terracotta works, help us to form a detailed picture of the different religions, society and the day-to-day life of the people of that age.

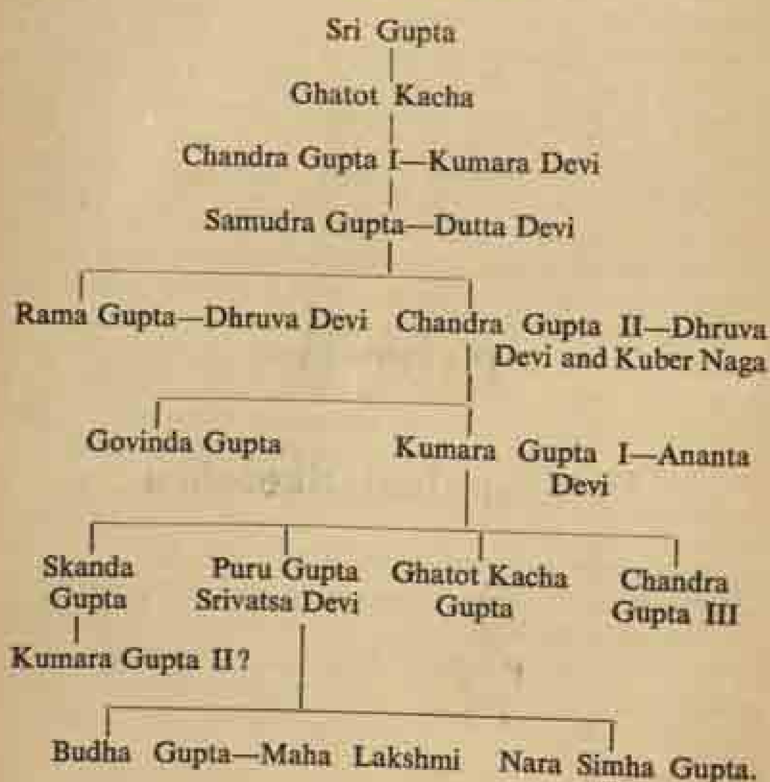
Dr. B.C. Roy finds in the Gupta art the inspiration and spirit which enabled India to achieve the supreme position in Asia. He writes that "Transplanted in new environments beyond the borders of India with its inherent vigour and richness of contents, this art brought into being the cultural empire of Greater India whose immortal glories have been unearthed from the water-less deserts of Central Asia and the fertile islands of the East."

PART II

Biographical Sketches

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCHES

The Imperial Guptas



BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCHES

H.G. Wells has described the reign of Asoka as the brightest interlude in the troubled history of mankind. He was so much impressed by the achievements of the great ruler that comparing him with the other great monarchs of the world he stated that "amidst the tens and thousands of the names of monarchs who crowded the columns of history, the name of Asoka shines and almost shines alone like a star". But this interlude was of a short duration and was followed by a long period of anarchy and disorder. This period is an anti-climax to the reign of Asoka, the Great, and is a dark age in the Hindu period of Indian history. Rulers almost stopped taking interest in the administration of their states. The rising tempo of Buddhism demoralised the army and deprived it of its martial character. Resultantly they fell an easy prey to foreign invaders. The principles of non-violence and idealism that Buddhism propagated ill-suited the needs of the time and caused devastating setback to the nation. The border rulers who some time earlier trembled at the very name of the great Mauryan kings, and whose further expansion towards India had been completely checked grew bold enough to attack the empire. This, coupled with internecine warfare, sounded the death-knell of the Mauryan Empire. India was parcelled out into many small independent states, always at war with one another; a portion of the country was captured by the foreigners.

In between the Mauryas and the Guptas, however, the Kushan ruler, Kanishka, does deserve credit for uniting the greater part of Northern India under his sway although he cannot be called an Indian king in the real sense as the seat of his government was at Peshawar, the border city of Northern India. After his death there again ensued a long period of disorder. Imperial Guptas with their far-sightedness understood the weakness of their contemporary rulers and exploited it to their utmost advantage. They were fairly rewarded. They ruled over India for about three

centuries and their reign witnessed the attainment of new heights in the fields of art, literature, culture, religion and architecture.

Accession of the Imperial Guptas was an event of supreme importance in the history of India. Dr. V.A. Smith writes, "With the accession of Guptas light again dawns, the veil of oblivion is lifted and the history of India regains unity and interest." This remark is apt and just. The disunity which existed before the ascendancy of the Guptas was perhaps the most disquietening feature of Indian history. There could be nothing spectacular in a history of internecine warfare amongst tribal chiefs and petty rulers. Shrouded in mystery, events of the period between the decline of the Kushans and the rise of the Guptas bear no authenticity about them. On the other hand, history of the Imperial Guptas is full of certain and precise facts. Contemporary literary, religious and foreign accounts also depict the march of events during the Gupta period.

Who were the Guptas and which region did they belong to? Different writers have extended different views with no finality about them. The enthusiasm, courage and zeal for Brahmanism may, for a moment, make one believe that the Imperial Guptas were presumably Kshatriyas but this appears to be an immature conclusion; no precise data is available in support of this contention. According to 'Kaumudi Mahotsava', a contemporary account, the Guptas seem to have belonged originally to a lower order of Hindu society. The author of this drama names the relatives of Guptas, 'the Lichchhavis', as 'Mlechchhas' and calls Chanda Sena (who has been identified as Chandra Gupta I by Dr. K.P. Jayaswal) a caste-less or a low-caste man, undeserving of royal honour. In the same drama we are told that Chanda Sena was adopted as a son by the Magadhan king. How could a low class man be adopted as a son by a king particularly when the latter was a high-caste Brahmin? The two contradictory statements cannot be reconciled. It is thus difficult to accept that Chandra Gupta belonged to a low caste.

Dr. K.P. Jayaswal points out another important thing which is also not in favour of the Guptas and makes their position dubious. He writes that the Guptas never disclosed their origin, caste or status anywhere on their coins or in their inscriptions. Hari Sena praises Samudra Gupta and describes in detail all his qualities, but he conceals the origin of his family and feels contented by merely mentioning that his ancestors were rulers. In the contemporary recor d, 'Kaumudi Mahotsava', Chanda Sena has been described as a 'Karaskara'. Baudhayana describes the 'Karaskara' as a low community with which the Brahmans do not mix up. In case they do so they perform a ceremony of purification. Dr. Jayaswal concludes in his account that the Guptas were originally Karaskara Jats and were inhabitants of Punjab. They were employed in the revenue department of the state during the reign of the Kushans and the Sakas.

Prabha Vati, a daughter of Chandra Gupta II (better known as Vikramaditya in history) was married to a Vakataka ruler. In the record her 'gotra' has been mentioned as 'Dharini'. Dr. H.C. Ray Chaudhary on the basis of this record straightaway rejects the views advanced by Dr. Jayaswal. According to him identification of Chanda Sena of the 'Kaumudi Mahotsava with Chandra Gupta I, son of Maharaja Ghatotkacha Gupta is untenable. Just because the Lichchhavis helped Chanda Sena is not enough evidence to identify the prince as Chandra Gupta I. The Imperial Guptas were probably related to queen 'Dharini', the chief consort of Agnimitra. Some other writers have tried to prove that the Gupta rulers were Kshatriyas. They have tried to trace their descent from the family of Arjuna of Mahabharata fame. No definite conclusion can, however, be drawn in this connection.

Yet another controversial issue is about the original home of the Guptas. Dr. D.C. Ganguly tries to locate it near-about the present city of Murshidabad. He does not agree with some historians who say that the Guptas had their original home in Magadha. He bases his conclusions on a statement of Itsing, the Chinese pilgrim who visited India in 671 A.D. Itsing mentions one Sri Gupta who built a

temple for the Chinese pilgrims near Mrigasi Khavana some 500 years ago.

The statement of the Chinese pilgrim was recorded in 690 A.D. and this led Allan to hold the view that Sri Gupta, the grand father of Chandra Gupta I, might have been ruling in 190 A.D. over the regions of which Mirgasi Khavana formed a part. The original Gupta state might, therefore be located about the city of Murshidabad. Dr. Fleet, an accredited historian for his research on the dates of the early Indian history, does not agree with this view. He feels that Sri Gupta cannot be said to have been ruling in 190 A.D. According to him Sri Gupta ruled probably in the third century A.D.

To rule out, altogether, the possibility of Sri Gupta, as identified by Itsing, to be the first ruler of the Imperial Gupta line, would also be unjust. Itsing recorded his statement about 500 years after the incident. He could not be very accurate, particularly when the people of that period were not so careful about the dates.

Another point which strikes is that there is a very small possibility of the existence of two rulers of the same name in the same region within such a short period. Had there been another Sri Gupta, different from the one who founded 'Imperial Gupta dynasty', he would have figured somewhere in the list of rulers of some other dynasty. Another set of historians who, although they agree with Allan that the benefactor of the temple was Sri Gupta of the Imperial Gupta family, refute the view that Guptas had their original home somewhere near Murshidabad.

The Guptas originally were the rulers of Magadha and the territories of Prayaga and Kosala were added to their empire by Chandra Gupta I according to Dr. H.C. Ray Chaudhury. Dr. R.K. Mookerjee writes that all the villages which were granted to the Buddhist monastery were situated in Magadha. Basing his arguments on the stages in the route followed by Itsing in his travels, he is of the opinion that Gupta territories might have extended as far as Murshidabad. As regards the dates of the two earlier kings, he

writes that Sri Gupta presumably ruled between 240 A.D. and 280 A.D. while his successor Ghatotkacha ruled from 280 A.D. to 319 A.D. Thus, there is a difference of about 50 years between the date recorded by Itsing and the one which is considered more appropriate. Perhaps the difference is due to the fact that mention of 500 years was made in a vague manner rather than on precise calculations.

Dr. R.C. Majumdar has drawn our attention to a picture belonging to the Gupta dynasty with a label bearing the word 'Mrigasthapana Gupta of Varendri' which appears in the illustrated Cambridge manuscript of 1015 A.D. from Nepal. Foucher holds the opinion that the word 'Mrigasi Khavana' appearing in the translation of Itsing account is not correct and it should be 'Mrigasthapana'. If it is true then the theory of Dr. D.C. Ganguly stands rejected as Murshidabad does not form part of the Varendri Division.

The above analysis leads us to infer that the Guptas most probably inhabited Magadha, their rule extended as far as Murshidabad in the earlier stages and they were not of a low caste, as stated by some writers.

SRI GUPTA

Sri Gupta is perhaps the first known historical figure among the Guptas. He has been mentioned in two different historical records which seem to be quite trust-worthy. The first, i.e. Allahabad Pillar Inscription, tells us about his status. The second historical record is the account of Itsing, a Chinese pilgrim who visited India during the seventh century A.D. These accounts help us to determine the location of his seat of government. Twenty-eighth line of the Allahabad Pillar inscription refers this illustrious king as an ancestor of Samudra Gupta :

"He was the son of the grandson of the Maharaja, the illustrious Gupta—who was the grandson of the Maharaja, the glorious Chandra Gupta I and of Mahadevi Kumara Devi, daughter of the son of Lichchhavis."

In this line the great-grandfather of Samudra Gupta has been referred to as 'Gupta' only. Dr. Fleet is of the opinion that 'Sri' was, in fact, an honorific term.

Sri Gupta was only a Maharaja. He enjoyed a subordinate position. Perhaps that is why no coin or inscription of his period is available. Samudra Gupta also, when referring to his ancestors, mentioned proudly of the family of his mother i.e. the Lichchhavis. Some writers are of the view that reference to Lichchhavis confirms that the earlier Guptas did not enjoy an independent sovereign position and their descendants took pride in mentioning the name of their mother's ancestors, who, according to Dr. V.A. Smith, enjoyed ascendancy in the North-Eastern political affairs of India for so many decades.

Itsing is the second authority of this period. He, perhaps, would not have bothered himself with the description of Sri Gupta's account but for the latter's having erected a temple for the Chinese pilgrims near Mrigasi Khavana. The Chinese pilgrim tells us that it was built about 500 years ago by one Sri Gupta. Dr. Fleet and some other writers have objected to the identification of 'Gupta' with 'Sri Gupta' but the majority of historians have overruled this objection by saying that there was no other Gupta except the one under reference. The Chinese pilgrim might not have been very precise about date, this being given to him on the authority of a 'tradition handed down from ancient times by old men'.

It can thus be said that Sri Gupta, the founder of Imperial Gupta line, flourished probably from 240 A.D. to 280 A.D. and ruled over Magadha. The authority of his rule extended as far as Murshidabad.

GHATOTKACHA GUPTA

Ghatotkacha Gupta, like his father, enjoyed a subordinate position and has been described only as a 'Maharaja' in the Allahabad Pillar Inscription. He probably ruled from 280 A.D. to 319 A.D., the year 320 A.D. being

the year of accession of Chandra Gupta I and the commencement of the Gupta era. No details of this period are available. Some of the writers have identified him with Ghatotkacha Gupta of the Vaisali seals, which is incorrect. Firstly, Vaisali was not a part of the empire of Ghatotkacha Gupta and secondly Ghatotkacha Gupta mentioned on the seal was not a Maharaja but a Kumaramatya. He was most probably a viceroy of Chandra Gupta II and his region formed part of the Gupta empire.

Some writers have confused him with 'Kacha' but that too is incorrect as it is certain that 'Ghatotkacha' has nowhere been described by this half name. He has also been identified by Dr. Bloch with the issuer of a coin which has been found in Leningrad museum bearing the word of 'Ghato'. Dr. Bloch thinks that it was a coin issued by Ghatotkacha Gupta. Other historians, however, do not agree with him as they are sure that no coin was issued by the Gupta rulers before Chandra Gupta I, because they did not enjoy any independent position. Further, the records of Prabha Vati Gupta, daughter of Chandra Gupta II (wherefrom we also come to know that the 'gotra' of the Guptas was 'Dharini') tell us that Ghatotkacha Gupta was the first of the Gupta rulers. This is not in line with the Allahabad Pillar Inscription.

A lot of confusion prevails about the early history of Guptas and there are several cobwebs which await cleaning out.

CHANDRA GUPTA I

Accession of Chandra Gupta I is a great event in the early history of India as this marked the beginning of an era of peace and prosperity which comes to a close with Budha Gupta. Chandra Gupta I was the first Gupta ruler who assumed the title of Maharajadhiraja. His two predecessors could never assert their independence and had to remain contended with the subordinate title of Maharaja. His reign is also popular for historical facts, their accuracy and definiteness.

(*i*) 'Kaumudi Mahotsava', a contemporary literary work, throws light on his early life, his family, his adoption by the ruler of Magadha, his enlistment of the help of Lichchhavis and his tragic end.

(*ii*) King and queen type coins of his period provide evidence to his marriage with Kumara Devi and its importance.

(*iii*) Puranas tell us about the extent of his empire as well as about his administration.

(*iv*) Allahabad Pillar Inscription mentions the event of his abdication in favour of his son.

Thus, notwithstanding some controversies, on the basis of literary, numismatic and epigraphic records we can draw a detailed picture of his reign.

Who was Chandra Gupta I? How he chanced to be a ruler, and then a Maharajadhiraja? These are some interesting points which need an elaborate examination.

Dr. Jayaswal attaches great importance to "Kaumudi Mahotsava", a contemporary literary work, and writes that Chandra Gupta belonged to 'Karaskar Jat' family. He was adopted by the ruler of Magadha, the latter having no natural heir, in spite of the fact that he had many wives. After some time, the old ruler unexpectedly got a natural heir from one of his queens. As can be expected, the old ruler started showing more love and inclination towards his real son. Chandra Gupta I, then known as Chandasena, felt jealous and dissatisfied and getting an opportunity, revolted. With the help of the Lichchhavis, whose daughter, Kumara Devi, he married, he besieged Sundara Varman, the old king of Magadha in his capital. Sundara Varman was defeated and killed and Chandra Gupta ascended the throne of Magadha. The young prince Kalyanasree, however, made good his escape. The royal court and the people of Patliputra were more inclined towards the prince, particularly since they saw the tragic end of their beloved old king by Chandra Gupta.

Chandra Gupta did not try to alleviate this hostile spirit of the people. Instead, he let loose a tyrannical rule in the

country and imprisoned all the suspected conspirators. The people tolerated patiently all the perverse and unjust acts of Chandra Gupta. The dormant volcano of their rebellious spirit, however, erupted in the form of rebellion on the borders. Chandra Gupta personally went to quell this disturbance. The people took advantage of his absence and invited Kalyanasree to be crowned as their ruler. There was nothing wrong in this direct action of the people according to Hindu Polity, says Dr. Jayaswal as the scriptures lay down that the King who acted as a tyrant or whose hands had the marks of blood of his parents should be destroyed. Chandra Gupta I tried hard to retrieve the situation but failed. In desperation, as has been literally interpreted in the seventh line of the Allahabad Pillar Inscription by Dr. Chhabra, Chandra Gupta I abdicated in favour of his son, Samudra Gupta, for he felt that the latter was the best among his children to succeed him and avenge his defeat.

According to Dr. Jayaswal, immediately after his accession Chandra Gupta dropped the second word of his name i.e. 'Sena' and instead added his surname 'Gupta'.

The story is not convincing and does not find much support from other historians. Firstly, there are contradictions within the drama itself which shake our faith in its authenticity. Chandra Gupta has been described a member of a low caste while the old ruler of Magadha was a Brahmin. Could not the high-born king get for adoption a young boy from some high class family? Why did he adopt Chandra Gupta when he knew that the latter was a low-caste boy? No satisfactory explanation to this question is available from any source.

Secondly, it is not understood how the ruler of Magadha managed to get hold of Chandra Gupta I for adoption when the Pillar Inscription of Allahabad clearly tells us that both the father and grandfather of Chandra Gupta I were Maharajas. It looks untenable that a Raja may agree to part with his only son, to see him being adopted by another king.

Thirdly, it is said that Chandra Gupta was a 'Karaskar Jat'. It is, however, evident from the records of Queen Prabha Devi that he belonged to the family of 'Queen Dharini'. If it be so the statement that he was the member of a lower order of society falls to the ground.

Fourthly, he is stated to have been killed in a battle with Kalyanasree. This is again contrary to the Allahabad Pillar Inscription where it is indicated that he abdicated in favour of his son Samudra Gupta.

The coins supplement the information available to us about the reign of Chandra Gupta I. As stated earlier, he was the first among the Gupta rulers to issue coins. There were no varieties in his coins and they seem to have been issued towards the end of his reign. The coins pertaining to his period have only the portraits of the king and the queen and their names on the obverse and the word 'Lichchhavi' together with the goddess and the lion on the reverse. The engraving of the queen's name on the coins proves that she exerted influence over the king. The word 'Lichchhavi' on the reverse depicts the political influence of the clan over Chandra Gupta I. Some of the writers, like Dr. Jayaswal, are of the opinion that the word 'Lichchhavi' was engraved on the coin as a sort of tribute to the Lcihchhavis for their help which enabled Chandra Gupta regain his lost position.

Dr. V.A. Smith has thus assessed the importance of the marriage on the basis of this coin : "The marriage proved to be an event of the highest political importance, as being the foundation of the fortune of a dynasty, destined to rival the glories of the Mauryas. Kumara Devi evidently brought to her husband as her dowry valuable influence, which, in the course of a few years, secured for him a paramount position in Magadha and the neighbouring countries".

Allan differs with Dr. V.A. Smith and writes : "It is evident from the pride with which it is mentioned by his successors that this union marked an epoch in the fortunes of the Gupta family. Whether, as Vincent Smith suggests (E.H.I.), the Lichchhavis at this time actually held Patliputra and that through his marriage Chandra Gupta succeeded to

the power of his wife's relatives may be doubted." He further writes : "It was probably due rather to the ancient lineage of the Lichchhavis than to any material advantages gained by his alliance that too much pride was taken by Guptas in Lichchhavis."

Prof. R.N. Dandekar has surmised that the Lichchhavis helped him to defeat the Maukhari king of Patliputra and establish himself there.

The authoress of 'Kaumudi Mahotsava' describes the Lichchhavis as 'Mlechchhas' and Chandasena a casteless or low-caste man not fit for royalty. This title for the Lichchhavis makes their position very dubious and the contention of Allan that "it was probably due rather to the ancient lineage of the Lichchhavis than to any material advantages gained by this alliance that too much pride was taken by the Guptas in Lichchhavis" is baseless. Dr. V.A. Smith also seems to have exaggerated the importance of this alliance. Dr. R.C. Majumdar feels that the Guptas gained politically more than socially, out of this matrimonial deal. The Lichchhavis' help perhaps hastened the restoration of the Guptas to the Magadhan throne which Chandra Gupta I could not take back from Kalyanasree in spite of repeated efforts and thus had been driven to such a desperation that he abdicated in favour of his son.

Northern India on the Eve of the Rise of The Imperial Guptas

Before the rise of the Imperial Guptas Northern India was parcelled out into many small principalities which were always at war with one another. Anarchy and disorder prevailed everywhere and the contemporary records, of which Puranas are pre-eminent, tell us that the people led a very deplorable life. The coins confirm this view. From the discovery of a large number of coins of different kings all over Northern India, belonging to the same period, we come to know about the existence of a large number of independent states.

Asoka has been held responsible for this chaotic situation by some writers. According to them his principles of non-violence gave a big setback to the martial spirit of Indians and they fell an easy prey to the foeign aggressors. The history of Northern India after Asoka and before the advent of the Imperial Guptas is a long, sad tale of foreign domination. The foreign rulers had no interest in their Indian subjects except their exploitation. This set in a dark period in the Indian history during which the lives of common people were not safe. They were politically enslaved, socially degraded, economically exploited and persecuted in their religious affairs.

It is from the Allahabad Pillar Inscription that we come to know about the existence of a dozen independent states, besides numerous small principalities in different parts of Northern India. These states had both monarchical as well as republican set-up. A few of them had maintained their existence for the last five to six centuries in spite of foreign attacks. The Imperial Guptas, after a protracted struggle subdued these states and gave to India a long spell of peace and prosperity which was cherished by its people even long thereafter.

From the Puranas, coins and Allahabad Pillar Inscription we know about the existence of the following independent states in Northern India on the eve of the rise of the Imperial Guptas :

REPUBLICAN STATES

1. The Arjunayanas.
2. The Malavas.
3. The Kunindas.
4. Kulutas.
5. The Audumbaras.
6. The Madrakas.
7. The Lichchhavis.
8. The Sibis.
9. The Yaudheyas.

MONARCHICAL STATES

1. Bhara Sivas (Naga Kings).
2. The Kingdom of Kausambhi.

3. The Kingdom of Ayodhya.
4. The Kingdom of Ahichchhatra.
5. The Kardamakas.

REPUBLICAN STATES

1. *The Arjunayanas*: The Republic of Arjunayanas presumably enjoyed a favourably good position in the political set-up of North-Western India on the eve of the rise of the Imperial Guptas. A mention of this republic in the Allahabad Pillar Inscription confirms this presumption. It maintained its existence in spite of several turmoils and revolutions which occurred in the history of North-Western India.

As its name implies, its people proudly linked their origin with Arjuna, the great hero of the Mahabharta. They were typical products of the ancient Indian civilization and its political institutions, which received a setback in other parts of Northern India with the emergence of despotic states. These people maintained their original set-up, wherein people's voice carried weight and they had every right to choose their administrators like our present democratic set-up. Unfortunately, we do not have sufficient material to make an elaborate examination of the people's life in this republican set-up. However, the efforts of these people to maintain their individuality and independent position make us form a very high opinion about them as well as their administration.

These people inhabited the area comprising modern regions of Bharatpur and Alwar states. The basis of this theory is the few coins which have been dug out near about Bayana and Alwar. These belong to the first century B.C. These people were fortunate enough to escape destruction at the hands of Alexander the Great. The Indo-Greek rulers, however, proved thorns in their sides. They had to continue their resistance to them during the former's occupation of North-Western India. The decline of these foreign rulers enabled them to re-assert themselves and extend boundaries of their territories in different directions by

their warlike activities. They ruled over a fairly large area at the close of the first century A.D. The issue of coins by them points to their independent position during that period.

They, however, received another set-back when the Sakas and the Kushans extended their sway over Punjab, a part of U.P. and Western India. They had to acknowledge the supremacy of these foreign races and subject themselves to several humiliations. However, their love for freedom did not allow them to remain for long in a subordinate position. Very soon they asserted their independence when the Sakas started showing signs of decay. They enjoyed an independent position on the eve of the rise of the Imperial Guptas. Like other republican states they also submitted to the mighty arms of Samudra Gupta. The latter, realising their spirit and patriotism, thought it proper not to exterminate them and allowed them internal autonomy after they had agreed to acknowledge his supremacy.

In spite of their small principality they were accorded the privilege of being included in the list of states mentioned in the Allahabad Pillar Inscription. It was on account of their renowned warlike qualities and intense love for freedom that Samudra Gupta felt proud, rather honoured, to make a mention of them as a state which acknowledged his supremacy.

We do not find any separate indentity of these people in the future Indian political set-up. They were presumably so completely absorbed in that big surge of Indian nationality set in motion by the Imperial Guptas that they never again could separate from it.

2. *The Malavas:* It was another republican set-up. It is very difficult to determine the exact date of its origin. We find a mention of these people even in the remotest past. There is a general view that these people, who were also known as Mallois, originally belonged to the hills of Malloi and were the descendants of a Dravidian race and flourished in Southern Punjab a few centuries before the Christian era.

They offered a stiff resistance to Alexander when the latter tried to reach the Arabian Sea through their country and won the praise of even the Aryans who had so far considered it below their dignity to maintain any relations with them through sheer contempt. The total number of their armed forces with which they harried Alexander was 90,000 which is a sufficient proof of their bravery. Although defeated, yet they inflicted heavy casualties on the great victor.

That they were freedom-loving can be proved from the fact that they preferred leaving their home land like the Rajputs and migration to the deserts of Rajputana, to leading life of slaves in the Punjab under the Indo-Greek rulers and, after them, the Kushan and the Saka chiefs.

They were professional warriors and never missed a war which was fought in North-Western India, between Indians or against a foreign invader. They are mentioned in the Mahabharata too.

They had settled down in Rajputana and Malwa. They should be accredited for not forgetting their ancient democratic institutions in spite of their carving out new homeland for themselves. In fact, their ancient political institutions and their splendid set-up were their only defence to keep themselves inspired when faced with heavy odds. The country of Malwa got its name from them. The historians are of the opinion that the Malavas migrated about a century before the beginning of the Christian era and it took them about 50 years to settle down and to declare their independence. The Indo-Greek rulers miserably failed to establish their Government in India permanently. Their decline also helped them in their enterprise. The year 57 B.C. which was the year of the beginning of their era was perhaps the year of their independence and the establishment of their own Government. The name of their capital was Malavanagar which was situated somewhere between Bundi and Tonk.

The Malavas were warlike. They carried on continuous wars against their neighbours and extended their boundaries in all directions. Some writers are of the opinion that

the year 57 B.C., when they started their Malava era, was a year of their victories against their enemies and it was to commemorate these that they started this era. On the eve of the rise of the Imperial Guptas the Malavas were at the zenith of their glory. Although subdued by Samudra Gupta, they did not lose their respect. Chandra Gupta II Vikramaditya was obliged to take up the title of Vikramaditya of Malwa. He owed much to this tribe during his struggles with the Sakas.

That they did not die as a race, becomes evident from the fact that, after the fall of the Imperial Guptas, they produced great men like Yashodharaman, who defeated Mihirgula, the great Hun leader, and saved India from further barbaric incursions.

Several coins and inscriptions of the Malavas have been discovered to prove that they had a long list of rulers in their political career. Although they could not get a chance to rule over the whole of Northern India, as a race they played a very important role in the history of this region and were perhaps second to none in their sacrifices for warding off the foreign attacks.

On the eve of the rise of the Imperial Guptas they ruled over an extensive area. They could not keep themselves isolated from the great revolution which engulfed the whole of Northern India and became part and parcel of that great empire which was established by Samudra Gupta. Their mention in Allahabad Pillar Inscription, as a republic which acknowledged the supremacy of Samudra Gupta, is another factor which speaks for their privileged position in the North-Western political set-up of the country. The excellence of internal autonomy in their administration saved them from total extinction.

3. *The Kunindas :* This republican tribe flourished in the low-lying areas of Shivalik Hills. Its lands were watered by the three rivers, the Yamuna, the Sutlej and the Beas. The early history of this tribe is shrouded in mystery and unlike the Malavas and Arjunayanas we do not find a mention of this tribe in any ancient record to justify its existence

in the remote past. This tribe presumably came into limelight after the decline of Indo-Greek rule in North-West India when several small tribal states and chiefs asserted their independence and carved out small principalities.

From the two types of coins of this tribe, which we have come across so far, we know of two tribal chiefs, Amoghabhuti and Chasresvara, who enjoyed some real political significance. The coins of Amoghabhuti are modelled very much on the pattern of the coins of the Indo-Greek kings, with Brahmi or Kharosthi legend inscribed on them. This close resemblance has led many writers to presume that Amoghabhuti flourished some time immediately after the fall of the Indo-Greek rule in the North-West India. This presumption is confirmed by the proud independent title of Maharaja which he took in his coins, which normally he could not have done in the face of a strong Indo-Greek rule in the Punjab. This also provides an evidence about the Greek influence over this tribe and we can say that like many other chiefs, the chief of Kunindas liberated his tribe from the foreign domination and to commemorate this event he issued coins and assumed the title of Maharaja. This was sometime during the closing years of the first century B.C.

Chatresvara is also known to us through his coins. These have a very close resemblance to the copper coins of the Kushan kings and have figures of Siva on them. The legend on these coins is in Brahmi and Siva is depicted as the Lord of Chhatra. From the close resemblance of these coins with those of the Kushans, some writers have drawn the conclusion that the country of the Kunindas, for some time after Amoghabhuti, fell on evil days. The tribe lost its independence and was subjugated by the Kushans. Chatresvara like Amoghabhuti liberated his country from the Kushans during the second or third century A.D. when the Kushan rule started showing signs of decay all over Northern India. Chatresvara issued these coins as a mark of independence of the tribe, and as the influence of the Kushans still ruled supreme, the coins of Chatresvara were based on the Kushan model.

From the coins of Chatresvara we know that he took up the titles of Mahatma and Bhagavata. It thus becomes clear that he was a Saivite. On the obverse of his coins we find the figure of Karttikeya, the god of war. We may compare these coins with the contemporary coins of Yaudheyas and conclude that the tribe, being very much proud of its warlike activities, might have taken a very active part to drive out the foreigners from the Indian soil and establish an independent rule in the Punjab.

Some of the writers hold that both Amoghabhuti and Chatresvara ruled in the second or third century A.D. The two different designs and models of the coins were in fact due to the influence of the two foreign races in the two areas respectively from where these coins were issued. Nothing can be said with certainty in this matter. However, one thing is very certain that the two rulers flourished at the time of the decline of the foreign rule in India when the Indians were in death-grip with the foreigners to win back their lost freedom.

The Kunindas were presumably over-run by the Kulutas, their neighbours, who were in turn defeated and subdued by the Guptas.

4. *The Kulutas* The tribe of the Kulutas inhabited the Kulu valley. They were the neighbours of the Kunindas. The Kulutas seem to have asserted their independence from the foreign domination sometime in the second century A.D. A mention of this tribe is made in 'Brihat-Samhita' and the 'Mudrarakshasa'. This tribe had a fairly long period of independent existence. Hieun-tsang, who visited India in the seventh century A.D. has also mentioned this tribe in his account.

We also come across the coins of one of the rulers, named Virayasas. Perhaps he ruled sometime in the second half of the 3rd century A.D.

The tribe was most probably subjugated by the Guptas but was allowed to enjoy internal autonomy as it is evident from the account of Hieun-tsang The tribe re-asserted

its independent existence in the seventh century A.D. in all probability when the Huns had established their sway in the Punjab. The tribe does not appear to be so important because we do not find its mention in the Allahabad Pillar Inscription.

5. *The Audumbaras :* The republic of Audumbaras also flourished in the vicinity of the Kulutas and the Kunindas. They probably inhabited the regions now comprising the districts of Gurdaspur, Hoshiarpur and the Eastern part of the district of Kangra. This was a vast hilly tract. From their coins it is evident that they had a long period of independent existence. They were one of the six sections of the ancient Salva tribe and thus seem to have a long record of their past civilization. They were very warlike and took pride in joining wars with a view to bringing to an end the alien rule in the Punjab.

The coins of the tribe indicate their inclination to the worship of Siva. These contain Prakrit legend of 'Bhagavats Mahadevasya Rajaryasya'. Some of these have the names of the rulers who issued them, like Daharaghosha, Sivadasa and Rudradasa. The legend contains, besides the king's name, a mention of (the god) Mahadeva which makes it clear that the tribe had a great faith in Siva or Mahadeva and attributed every victory, even its independent existence and government, to that god. We have also come across a few copper coins of this tribe from which also we get an indirect hint about the people's faith in Siva, in the representation of a Siva temple, a dhvaja, a trident and a battle-axe. Some of the writers have tried to associate Rudravarman of the Vemaki tribe with the Audumbaras on the basis of his coins.

The coins of the Audumbaras are presumed to have been issued in the two centuries, one preceding and the second succeeding the beginning of the Christian era. On the basis of the close resemblance of the coins some historians have tried to associate kings like Aryamitra, Mahimitra, Bhumimitra and Mahabhutimitra with the Audumbaras. However, nothing definite can be said in this connec-

tion without further positive evidence. Further discoveries may perhaps lead us to some definite conclusion.

6. *The Madrakas :* The Madrakas have been mentioned along with many other republican tribes, who accepted the suzerainty of Samudra Gupta and were allowed to enjoy their internal autonomy, in the Allahabad Pillar Inscription. These people inhabited the Northern regions between the rivers Ravi and Chenab and had their seat of Government at Sakala (Modern Sialkot, West Pakistan). A branch of this tribe inhabited the Himalayan regions, adjacent to the territories of Uttara-Kurus and were lovers of freedom.

The tribe was ruled by a Paurva king when Alexander invaded India. Along with other tribes they were forced to accept the foreign domination. The Indo-Greek kings selected Sialkot as their seat of Government. They remained under the foreign domination for a pretty long time. The decline of the Indo-Greek rule gave them a chance of freedom but it proved to be short-lived as they were again subdued by the Kushans. They reasserted their independence after the fall of the Kushan rule. They enjoyed such a good position as a republic as to attract the attention of Harisena. They are mentioned as a feudatory of the great Gupta emperor, Samudra Gupta.

Unfortunately, no other epigraphic or numismatic evidence has so far come to our knowledge to furnish more details of this tribe.

7. *The Lichchhavis :* The Lichchhavis seem to be in command of a very respectable position as a tribe on the eve of the rise of the Guptas. Unfortunately, we do not possess many details of this republic although they played a very important role in the establishment of the Gupta rule in the Eastern India.

Writers hold varied and conflicting views about the role of this tribe in the Gupta ascendancy, the place where this tribe ruled and its importance in the political set-up of India. Dr. V.A. Smith attaches great importance to the

matrimonial alliance of Chandra Gupta I with Kumara Devi. He writes, "The marriage proved to be an event of the highest political importance, as being the foundation of the fortune of a dynasty destined to rival the glories of the Mauryas. Kumara Devi evidently brought to her husband, as her dowry, valuable influence, which in the course of a few years, secured to him paramount position in Magadha and the neighbouring countries". He suggested that "Presumably the Lichchhavis were masters of Patliputra and Chandra Gupta, by means of his matrimonial alliance, succeeded to the power previously held by his wife's relatives." If we agree with this view of Dr. V.A. Smith we will have to conclude that the Lichchhavis were the real architects of the Gupta fortunes. This view, however, does not get any confirmation from the contemporary records except a coin of Chandra Gupta, wherein he appears with Kumara Devi inscribed with the word 'Lichchhavis'. This coin does show that the Guptas were indebted to the Lichchhavis for their rise but it does not indicate that they inherited their fortunes from the Lichchhavis. Dr. Jayaswal has tried to prove on the basis of a drama, 'Kaumudi Mahotsava', that the Lichchhavis of Vaisali were rivals of the rulers of Patliputra and, Chandasena, who was none else but Chandra Gupta, in token of his gratitude for the help of the Lichchhavis, (According to him they helped Prince Chandasena to capture Patliputra) made a mention of their clan, as well as their princess Kumara Devi, to whom he had already been married, in his coins. This contemporary record does not mention anywhere, that the Lichchhavis had captured the imperial city of Patliputra from the successors of Pushyamitra and handed it over to Chandra Gupta, who enjoyed a subordinate position.

Allan holds a different view. According to him, "The pride of the Guptas in their Lichchhavis blood was probably due more to the ancient lineage of the Lichchhavis than to any material advantages gained by this alliance".

Some other writers hold that the name of Kumara Devi as well as her clan appeared in the coins of Chandra Gupta I as "Kumara Devi was a queen by her own right, and the

proud Lichchhavis, to whose stock she belonged, must have been anxious to retain their individuality in the new imperial state".

Dr. R.C. Majumdar differs both with Dr. V.A. Smith and Allan. He thinks that the matrimonial alliance did the political importance but not as much as has been ascribed to it by Dr. V.A. Smith. The Lichchhavis ruled over Vaisali in the fifth century preceding the Christian era and not at the time of the rise of the Imperial Guptas. All the available contemporary records show that the Lichchhavis ruled in Nepal at this time. However, the term Lichchhavis of the coins does not mean the Lichchhavis-rulers of Nepal. It may perhaps be the Lichchhavis people, as Samuda Gupta takes pride in calling himself a Lichchhavis Dauhitra, in the Allahabad Pillar Inscription. At the same time the Lichchhavis state of Nepal has been mentioned as a subordinate state under him. From this it becomes evident that he had no respect for the Lichchhavis royal house of Nepal.

It may be concluded that the Lichchhavis and the Guptas were neighbours and cemented their relations by a matrimonial alliance which later on resulted in their union and enhancement of the power and prestige of the new kingdom.

Dr. B.P. Sinha is right in saying that the rise of the Guptas to the imperial position was largely due to the Lichchhavis, who were later on absorbed in the Gupta empire. Dr. Sinha has compared this union with the union of Kanauj and the state of Harsha Vardhana. According to him the Lichchhavis state was merged into the Gupta empire during the period of Samudra Gupta who presumably inherited their kingdom.

It can thus be said that although the importance and the location of the Lichchhavis as a clan or a state are as yet controversial issues, it is definite that they played a very important part in the political history of Northern India on the eve of the rise of the Imperial Guptas.

8. *The Sibis :* These people have been mentioned in the Allahabad Pillar Inscription. Presumably they did not enjoy a very important position on the eve of the rise of the Imperial Guptas and were considered worth mentioning as a republic, which acknowledged the supremacy of Samudra Gupta, only on account of their glorious past.

They were described as 'Sivas' in Rig Veda and enjoyed a respectable position in the political history of the Punjab during the fourth century B.C., when Alexander invaded India. They inhabited the modern Jhang district of Western Pakistan and were renowned for their warlike activities. From the Greek records we know that they advanced to meet the army of Alexander, covered with the skins of the wild beasts, holding clubs as their weapons of war. From the contemporary accounts it appears that the strength of their army was about forty thousand foot soldiers, besides war elephants. They offered a very stiff resistance to the Macedonian army. When all their efforts failed to stem the tide of the victor, they left their homes for good and preferred migration to the deserts of Rajputana, to remaining as slaves of the Indo-Greek rulers in the Punjab. They carved out a small republican government round about Chittor and carried on their struggle against the foreign monarchs in North-Western India.

From their coins it is evident that their capital city was known as Madhyamika which has been identified by modern historians with modern Nagari near Chittorgarh. A group of the Sibis settled in Sind and another group went to the South and established itself on the banks of river Cauveri. Although the Sibis did not enjoy as privileged a position as the Malavas, they played an equally important part in the politics of Western India on the eve of the rise of Imperial Guptas. Several coins of these people have since been found in the different parts of Rajputana and they lend support to our conviction that the Sibis, like the proud Rajputs of later centuries, were very determined soldiers as well as great lovers of independence. They sacrificed their comforts of life but proved themselves to be true sons of India.

9. *The Yaudheyas:* The republic of the Yaudheyas presumably was the most important among states of such type on the eve of the rise of the Imperial Guptas. The Allahabad Pillar Inscription refers to it as a republic which had acknowledged the supremacy of Samudra Gupta. The people of this tribe enjoyed an internal autonomy and their democratic set-up was not disturbed. However, presumably, they were deprived of the right to issue coins, as we do not come across any coins belonging to them after the establishment of Gupta supremacy in Northern India.

These people seem to have passed through very critical times. It indeed, goes to their credit that they did not give way to despair and fought for their freedom with perseverence. They desisted from their efforts only when they were finally absorbed, on the basis of equality, in the vast upsurge of Indian nationality as a result of a revolution led by the Imperial Guptas.

The Yaudheyas, as implies from their name, traced their origin from Yaudheya, a son of Yudhishthira of the Mahabharta fame. They are also called so, as they were the true yodhas or warriors. Dr. Altekar writes, "They possessed a mystic formula (Mantra) ensuring victory in all circumstances and against all odds".

We also find a reference of this tribe in Panini's 'Ashtadhyayi'. They belonged to the early Kshatriya stock. They were very proud of their ancient culture and institutions and high birth. It was presumably through the inspirations which they derived from the records of their ancestors that they were in a position to keep their ancient culture intact. The foreign domination could not crush their spirit and they asserted their independence whenever they got a chance.

Although the history of the Yaudheyas can be traced as far back as the Mahabharta, no details about their institutions or administrative set-up are available. There is no mention of this tribe for several centuries after Mahabharta. We have no written record about its heroes. It is only on the basis of a few coins and seals that we can sketch the history of this republic, who like the Rajputs of later times, had

to their credit several struggles to liberate their country. It is evident that they ruled over a very extensive area. The coins have been discovered over a wide area, Multan in the West and Saharanpur in the East and at places like Dehra Dun and Rohtak. Their seals have been found at Ludhiana. Probably the capital of the Yaudheyas lay somewhere between Rohtak and Ludhiana and the empire extended over the greater part of the Punjab and some districts of U.P. and Rajasthan. The tribe commanded respect and praise for the chivalry of its people, even when on its decline. The Junagadh Inscription compliments them by describing them as a "very proud and indomitable" people. Presumably, Samudra Gupta thought it a privilege to be known as the over-lord of these people. This was perhaps the reason that these people have been mentioned in his Allahabad Pillar Inscription.

Some of the writers have tried to identify these people with the Maltamayuraka people of Rohtak on the basis of their worship of Karttikeya (the god of war). Some other writers have tried to identify them with the Johiya Rajputs residing on both the banks of Sutlej, touching the erstwhile Bahawalpur State.

It is surprising that these people are not mentioned in the Greek records. Presumably, Alexander the Great did not advance as far as their country and thus did not come into contact with them. These people, however, had to suffer subjection by the Indo-Greek rulers for some time. The decline of the Indo-Greek rulers offered them an opportunity. They not only asserted their independence but also extended the boundaries of their empire at the expense of the Indo-Greek territories. They were presumably again reduced to a subordinate position by the Kushans. They, however, struck at the Kushan empire as soon as it started on its decline. According to Dr. Altekar, the Yaudheyas played a very prominent part in the downfall of the Kushan empire.

Their coins issued in 175 A.D. bear the legend :

'Yaudheyaganasya Jayah'.

Allan translated it as 'Victory of the Yaudheya tribe'... Presumably, this coin was issued immediately after the Kushans were driven out of the Yaudheya territories and the tribe regained its independence. Another coin of the Yaudheyas bears legend "of Brahmanya (a name of Karttikeya), the divine lord of the Yaudheyas" from which it becomes evident that the struggle with the Kushans was attributed to the god of war and the tribe was fighting in his name.

We also come across another inscription of this tribe at Bijayagadh, in the district of Bharatpur. In this inscription an indication of the appointment of Maharaja Mahasenapati as the leader of the tribe has been given. It is presumed to be inscribed during the third century A.D. The president of the tribe, elected by the people, performed the duties of a Senapati in war and presumably those of a magistrate in peace. He styled himself as a Maharaja.

The seal of this tribe located at Ludhiana bears the legend 'Yodheynam Jayamamtra-dharanam' which has been translated by Allan as 'of the Yaudheya councillors of victory'.

Coins of the Yaudheyas bear the stamp of the Kushan coins. On the basis of interpretation of the words *dvi* and *tr*, which appear at the end of some of their legends, some writers have tried to prove that the Yaudheyas were a confederation of several tribes, like Lichchhavis and were governed by a supreme council at the centre which was drawn from the different tribes. On the basis of the relationship between Arjun (from whom the Arjunayanas traced their origin) and Yaudheya (a son of Yudishthira who is supposed to be the originator of the Yaudheyas), Dr. Altekar has tried to prove the possible existence of a loose union between the two words *dvi* and *tr* appearing at the end of the legend.

The Yaudheyas have also been mentioned in the Puranas. Some of the modern writers have tried to credit them wholly for driving out the Kushans from the soil of India. This, however, seems to be an exaggeration of the facts. The Yaudheyas did play their part to liberate Punjab

but they were not the only people living in the Punjab at that time.

The Yaudheyas did not enjoy freedom for long and were subdued by Samudra Gupta. They were presumably absorbed beyond recognition in the national drive organised by the Guptas. We do not find any trace of this tribe as a separate entity in the later history.

Besides the republics whose details are given above there were many other small republican principalities scattered all over North-Western India. The Allahabad Pillar Inscription gives us the names of Prarjunas, Sanakanikas, Kakas and Kharaparikas, the details of which are not worthwhile or very authentic. The fuller details of other small settlements like the Abhiras, Rajanya Janpada, Uttamabhadras etc., are not forthcoming.

We are still in the dark about the future history of these republics after they were subjugated by Samudra Gupta. We have come across some records about the existence of a few of them but the fate of others after the Guptas is not known.

As stated by Dr. Altekar in 'Vakataka-Gupta Age' there is no positive evidence to support the view that the careers of Yaudheya, the Madra, the Arjunayana and the Malava republics mentioned in Allahabad Pillar Inscription came to an end owing to the imperialistic ambition and expansion of the Guptas. They only accepted Samudra Gupta's overlordship. It is quite possible that the republics may have continued their autonomous existence during the reigns of Chandra Gupta II and Kumara Gupta I, even down to the middle of the fifth century A.D., when they seem to have been engulfed in the Hun avalanche.

Monarchical States

1. *Bhara Sivas* (*Naga Kings*) : The fall of the Kushans was a signal for disruptionist tendencies to raise their heads again all over India and create anarchy and disorder.

The period between the fall of the Kushans and the rise of the Imperial Guptas is known as the dark age of the Hindu period. The Puranas have painted a pathetic picture of India during this period.

On the basis of Puranas and other contemporary records Dr. Jayaswal has tried to throw some light on this period. He thinks that Bharasivas, whom some writers have tried to link up with the Nagas, assumed great power and extended their government over the whole of Northern India. They even captured a part of the Deccan. Later on, they became known as Navanagas of Mathura, Kantipuri and Padmavati. The Pallavas, the Vakatakas and the Guptas held subordinate positions under them. Like the Guptas, the Bharasivas had many autonomous republics and monarchies under them.

According to Dr. Jayaswal Bharasivas should be given the same importance as the Mauryas and the Guptas and mentioned as the successors of Kushans and predecessors of the Guptas, although like the latter they did not have an equally impressive list of important rulers. They had to their credit the performance of 10 Ashvamedha sacrifices and the destruction of the foreign domination of the Kushans. Dr. Jayaswal describes them as the founders of a rule which was largely based on the ancient Hindu traditions and ideology of Hindu sovereignty. They have thus been described as the forerunners of the Gupta supremacy and greatness : "The tradition initiated by the Bharasivas was kept up by the Vakatakas and was taken over by the Guptas and fully maintained by the subsequent emperors from Chandra Gupta Vikramaditya to Baladitya. If there had been no Bharasivas there would not have come into existence a Gupta Empire and the Gupta Vikramadityas....The Bharasivas re-established Hindu sovereignty in Aryavarta. They restored the Hindu imperial throne and the national civilization and gave a new life to their country. They revived Ashvamedha after a lapse of some four centuries. They restored the sanctity of the Mother Ganges, the river of Lord Siva, throughout its length by freeing her from sin and crime, and her worthy to be sculptured at the doors of the temples of the Vakatakas and the Guptas as a symbol of purity. They did all

this, and left no memorial to themselves. They left their deeds and obliterated themselves".

Dr. Bhandarkar, however, does not appreciate the forceful plea of Dr. Jayaswal and points out that Ashvamedha sacrifice, as denoted by the term in the real sense, and the significance it had during the Gupta period, was not rightly understood and strictly followed during this period. Even rulers who could not have a real significant victory or a conquest to their credit performed it. Therefore, the Ashvamedha sacrifice of the Bharasivas does not lend any real charm to the reader or get appreciation. Secondly, the Bharasivas could not be given a place in history like the Mauryas or the Guptas as they were not the only force to oust the Kushans. The Yaudheyas, Malavas, Kunindas, the Maghas etc. are to be given an equal credit in this respect. According to Dr. A.S. Altekar the disintegration of the Kushana Empire was not the result of activities of Bharasivas of Kantipuri. By carefully studying the coins and inscriptions of the contemporary powers it shall be evident that the Yaudheyas, the Kunindas, Malavas, the Nagas and the Maghas, who assumed independence and struck their own coins in the third century, all played their parts in driving out the Kushans.

Dr. Jayaswal writes that the official title of the founder of Nava Naga dynasty was Bharasivas who ruled over a greater part of Uttar Pradesh between A.D. 140 to A.D. 170. Through his coins he has been connected with Padmavati and Vidisa on the one hand and with Virasena and the kings of Kausambhi on the other.

It is from the Puranas that we come to know about the four Naga strongholds of Vidisa, Kantipuri, Padmavati and Mathura. By the time the Guptas rose in Magadha there had already been seven Naga kings at Mathura and nine at Padmavati.

The other rulers of note who have been linked with Bharasivas are Virasena and Bhavanaga. The former ruled from 170 A.D. to 210 A.D. over the greater part of Doab between the Ganges and the Yamuna with his capital at

Mathura. What made Dr. Jayaswal link Virasena with Bharasiva were the coins of the former which resemble very much with those of Bharasivas.

Bhavanaga flourished sometime towards the close of third century A.D. and ruled up to 315 A.D. The Vakataka records have described him as an important monarch of a dynasty which had to its credit 10 Ashvamedha sacrifices sand "who were besprinkled on the forehead with the pure water of (the river) Bhagirathi that had been obtained by their valour". The Nagas continued to rule over the greater part of the Doab lying between the Ganges and the Yamuna.

We come across the names of two rulers of Naga Dynasty in the Allahabad Pillar Inscription. They were Ganapati Naga and Nagasena. These rulers were defeated and uprooted by Samudra Gupta. From the available records it becomes evident that Ganapati Naga was the ruler of Padmavati. Some of his coins have been discovered at Padma-Pawaya which confirms our view. In 'Harsha Charitra' it is mentioned that Nagasena was the ruler of Padmavati, "who was foolish enough to have the secrets of his policy discussed in the presence of the sarika bird which declared them aloud".

Both Ganapati and Nagasena could not be the rulers of the same place at one and the same time. It is, therefore, presumed that Ganapati ruled earlier and after his defeat and death at the hands of Samudra Gupta, he was succeeded by Nagasena. Nagasena wanted to avenge the death of Ganapati Naga and presumably joined in a league with Achyuta and the prince of the Kota family against Samudra Gupta. The league, however, was broken by Samudra Gupta during his second invasion of Aryavarta and Nagasena lost his life.

Achyuta who joined the league with Nagasena, ruled over the modern districts of Rampur and Bareilly and some adjoining regions forming the former state of Rohilkhand. On the basis of the close resemblance of his coins with those of the Naga kings some writers have tried to identify him

with the Naga kings as a scion of collateral branch of the Mathura family.

Besides these three Naga kings we come across names of many other Naga chiefs who had established their sway over the different parts of Northern India on the eve of the rise of the Imperial Guptas. The names of Nagadatta and Nandi have been mentioned in the Allahabad Pillar Inscription. Presumably, they also belonged to the Naga family. Dr. Ray Chaudhury mentions the name of another Naga prince, "Sivanandi".

Thus, on the eve of the rise of the Imperial Guptas, the Nagas ruled over a greater part of Northern India. They were the founders of the future greatness of the Imperial Guptas although by the time of the rise of the Imperial Guptas several weaknesses had crept in the Naga rule which facilitated the work of their subjugation by Samudra Gupta. The contemporaries of Samudra Gupta, although of the same Naga stock, lacked the vigour and zeal which had helped the earlier Naga rulers to drive out the Kushans. They were a mere shadow of the greatness of their predecessors and were easily subdued. In spite of their drawbacks "the foundations of modern Hinduism were laid by the Naga emperors and that edifice was reared by the Vakatakas and elaborated by the Guptas", according to Dr. Jayaswal.

2. *The Kingdom of Kausambhi :* An independent state was founded at Kausambhi by king Bhimasena in 130 A.D. when the Kushan empire was still being ruled over by Huvishka. Bhimasena seems to have been a brave man and was the first North-Indian chief to assert his independence from the foreign domination of the Kushans by taking the title of Maharaja. From another record of this king found at Bandhogarh it becomes evident that he ruled over a pretty large kingdom.

Bhimasena was succeeded by his son Maharaja Kautsiputra Pothasiri sometime in 140 A.D. The latter ruled for about thirty years. Several coins and inscriptions of this ruler have been discovered in which he has been described

as a great ruler. Unfortunately, these records still remain undeciphered and their interpretations are disputed.

We also come across the name of another ruler, Bhadramagha, who was also ruling at Kausambhi contemporaneously. Some time later perhaps he occupied the territories of Pothasiri. Dr. D.C. Sircar has tried to explain their possibility of simultaneous rule in a chapter of the 'Age of Imperial Unity'. According to him Bhadramagha may have been a younger step-brother of Bhimasena or an elder step-brother of Prausthasri. He was the immediate successor of Maharaja Bhimasena. Perhaps Prausthasri rebelled againt his authority and declared himself king in the Southern parts of the kingdom (Baghelkhand) about the closing years of Bhadramagha's reign. Later on he extended his power over the Kausambhi region also.

Prima facie, these views appear to be quite convincing but when viewed critically, especially in the light of the fact that Bhadramagha was none else but Bhadradeva of the Bandhogarh inscription of 166 A.D., these do not seem to be tenable. Rather, we are forced to say that Bhadramagha was ruling over Kausambhi, while Praushthasri held his court at Baghelkhand. After Prausthasri had died, Bhadramagha occupied his territories. Dr. Altekar thinks that Bhadramagha was a son of Prausthasri. He is, however, unable to explain how Bhadramagha ruled simultaneously with his father. It would be more correct to say that Bhadramagha and Prausthasri belonged to two different clans. This view is supported by the evidence of the coins through which we come across the following names of the kings who ruled over Kausambhi : Bhadramagha, Sivamagha, Stamagha, Bhimavarman, Vijayamagha, Purumagha, Yugamagha, Pusvasri, Navika, Rudra, Dhanadeva. Of these names those ending in Magha seem to belong to one family, while others seem to be connected with some different stock.

It can thus be concluded that Kausambhi, which enjoyed a very important position in Eastern India, came to be ruled by the people of different stocks at different times.

On the eve of the rise of the Imperial Guptas it was being ruled by Rudra Deva, mentioned in the Allahabad Pillar Inscription. Samudra Gupta defeated him and annexed Kausambhi and its adjoining territories to his vast empire.

3. *The Kingdom of Ayodhya:* During the century preceding the Christian era and in the three centuries succeeding it a kingdom flourished round the historic city of Ayodhya which was its capital. It roughly corresponded to modern Oudh. The city was situated on the bank of 'Saryu' and was also known in the early records by the name of Sakita.

The chief source of information, in respect of this kingdom, is a hoard of coins. From their study we know that there were two dynasties ruling over this kingdom one after the other. At one time it formed a part of the Kushan empire but presumably remained under the Indian rulers who formally acknowledged the Kushan supremacy. The coins of the dynasty which ruled earlier to the Kushan rule are of a square type and do not have any foreign influence. The coins of the second dynasty are round and are based on the model of the earlier Indian coins. The names of the rulers of the first dynasty, made known to us from the coins, are Dhandeva, Visakhadeva, Muladeva, Vayerdeva, Naradatta and Sivadutta. None of them, except Dhanadeva, who is presumed to be Dharmaraja Dhana, a king of Kosala of Ayodhya inscription, seems to have been called as a Raja. Some writers have tried to trace their descent from Pushyamitra, the Sunga king, and assign a reign period of about two centuries to this dynasty.

Presumably, the rulers of the second dynasty established their government immediately after the Kushan rule came to an end in these regions. They might have played an important role in driving out the Kushans. The records, however, are silent on this point. On the obverse of the coins a bull is shown and the reverse contains a cock and a post. Satyamitra, Ayumitra, Sanghamitra, Vijayamitra, Devamitra, Ajavaraman and Kumudasena were some of the rulers of this dynasty, who have been represented in the

coins. Most probably Chandra Gupta I attacked this kingdom and annexed it to his empire.

4. *The Kingdom of Ahichchhatra :* The city of Ahichchhatra, which can presumably be identified with the modern city of Ramnagar, was the capital of the kingdom of North Panchala. Some writers think that this kingdom consisted of Rohilkhand and some adjacent areas.

Unfortunately, no detailed records of the achievements of the rulers of this kingdom are available. A few coins and epigraphic evidence of this dynasty have brought to light the names of some kings. It was perhaps a small state and its rulers were mere chieftains or the "Lords of Panchala kingdom" as they have been called by Dr. R.C. Majumdar. They are also known as 'Mitra kings' as the names of majority of them end with the word 'Mitra'. We come across the names of Bhadra Ghosha, Suryamitra, Phalgunimitra, Agnimitra, Vishnumitra, Jayamitra, Indramitra, Brihatsvatimitra, Visvapala, Rudra Gupta and Jaya Gupta. To this list of the rulers we may add the names of Vangapala, Dama Gupta, Vasu Sena, Yajnapala, Prajapatimitra and Varuna mitra on the basis of the recent discoveries. These rulers presumably ruled from 50 B.C. to 260 A.D.

Besides the above names we have the names of two more kings, i.e. Ashadasena and Trivarniputra Bhagvata from the Pabhosa cave inscriptions. Copper coins of another king, named Achyuta have been discovered. Some writers have tried to identify this Achyuta with the ruler mentioned in the Allahabad Pillar Inscription. On the basis of this identification as an ally of the Naga chiefs, and also the close resemblance of his coins with the coins of the Nagas, Dr. Altekar has presumed him to be a Naga chief.

The kingdom of Ahichchhatra seems to possess considerable significance at the time of the rise of the Imperial Guptas, as its ruler ventured to oppose Samudra Gupta whose mighty armies had over-run the whole of India.

5. *The Kardamakas :* It was a Bactrian tribe and ruled over the Western India for about three centuries.

They had wrested power from Kshaharatas and were an important power to be reckoned with on the eve of the rise of the Imperial Guptas. The founder of this dynasty was Chashtana who was a feudatory of the Kushans for some time. There is nothing interesting either in the details of history of Chashtana or his son, Jayadaman, who died at a young age.

Rudradaman I, a grandson of Chashtana, is perhaps the first ruler of significance of this dynasty. He defeated Gautmiputra Satkarni, the lord of the Deccan. From his Junagadh Inscription it is evident that he ruled over a vast kingdom which comprised Akara, Avanti, Anupa, Aparants, Surashtra and Anarta. From the other coins of Chashtana we get a hint about a possible expansion of the Kardamaka empire at the cost of the Satavahana kingdom. Rudradaman I ruled for about twenty years. He is said to have defeated the Yaudheyas. He was a great king and ruled over Malwa, Kathiawar, Gujarat, the Northern Konkan and the Mahishmati regions on the Narbada. He was not only a great warrior but was also a great administrator. He is said to have reconstructed the dam of the Sudarshana Lake constructed during the Mauryan period, which was breached due to a terrible cyclone. This was one of his great achievements in the field of public utility. The prosperity of the people of Saurashtra depended very much on this dam. Rudradaman is said to have "enjoyed royal fortune even when he was in his mother's womb". The exact significance of this claim cannot be realised at present. His good rule cleared the land of disease, robbers, wild beasts and other pests. He was also a patron of Classical Sanskrit and was himself a past master in grammar, polity, music and logic and was reputed for the excellence of his composition in Sanskrit, both in prose and verse. (Age of Imperial Unity).

Rudradaman was succeeded by Damaghsada whose reign was short and uneventful. His death was a signal for a war of succession between his brother Rudrasimha I and son, Jivadaman. Both of them ruled alternately till 199 A.D.. It is interesting to note that neither of the two

claimants could issue coins as Mahakshatrapa (Supreme ruler) during the years 179 A.D. to 181 A.D. and again from 188 A.D. to 190 A.D. Rapson has explained it as due to their internal struggle. Bhandarkar, however, thinks that the absence of their coins as Mahakshtrapa from 188 A.D. to 190 A.D. was because they were reduced to subordinate position by Isvaradutta, an Abhira ruler, who ruled in these regions during these years. His viewpoint seems to be more correct.

Presumably, the position was similar in the years 179 A.D. to 181 A.D. Rudrabhuti, an Abhira general, had grown strong enough to become Mahakshatrapa, exile Jivadaman and reduce Rudrasimha to a subordinate position. Thus, the mutual quarrels of the Kardamakas twice deprived them of their supreme position and gave a chance to Abhiras to become their overlords.

Rudrasimha was succeeded by his son Rudrasena I in 200 A.D. as a Mahakshatrapa. From clay seals of Mahadevi Babhudama, a sister of Rudrasena I, discovered at Basrah, it becomes evident that she was married to a chief of the Lichchhavi tribe and that the Kardamakas had matrimonial alliance with the Lichchhavis.

Rudrasena I ruled for about twenty-two years from 200 A.D. to 222 A.D. and was succeeded by his two brothers, Samghadaman and Damasena, who ruled for another fourteen years. Their period was uneventful. The power of the Kardamakas started declining after this period. It was presumably due to their internal quarrels and the rise of the Abhiras in the adjoining territories.

Yasodaman was the next chief of the Kardamakas. The history of Kardamakas after him is not of any consequence. Several chiefs took up the government during the next century but no one had any great victory or administrative achievement to one's credit. The chronology of the Kardamaka chiefs as given in their inscription is thus given by Dr. D. C. Sircar:

Vigayasena	(239-50 A.D.)
Damajada Sri III	(251-55 A.D.)
Rudrasena II	(256-76 A.D.)
Visvasimha	(276-79 A.D.)
Bhartradaman	(282-96 A.D.)

Svami Rudrasena, son of Rudradaman II was a ruler of some significance. He ruled in the middle of the fourth century A.D. and was succeeded by his son Rudrasena III. The last important ruler of this dynasty was Rudrasimha III.

After Bhartridaman the Kardamakas were perhaps subjected to a subordinate position as the coins of his successors indicate them as Kshatrapas and not as Mahakshatrapas. Presumably, they were overthrown by the Sassanids of Iran and the later rulers were mere feudatories of Iranian monarchs.

Anarchy and disorder seem to be prevailing in the country when Chandra Gupta II Vikramaditya invaded their kingdom and extended the Gupta rule over the Western India.

Conquests and Extent of Empire of Chandra Gupta I

Unfortunately we do not have a complete record of the conquests of Chandra Gupta I. It is mainly on the basis of some contemporary accounts that the different writers have tried to construct details of his conquests and extent of empire. These are very controversial.

On the basis of the coins as well as some written records Dr. V.A. Smith has tried to prove that Chandra Gupta I and his predecessors enjoyed a subordinate position before a matrimonial alliance with the Lichchhavis. Chandra Gupta in fact became an independent ruler with a respectable state only after his marriage; he got in dowry the kingdom of Magadha.

On the basis of 'Kaumudi Mahotsava', a contemporary account, Dr. Jayaswal has also arrived at a similar conclusion about the possession of the kingdom of Magadha through the Lichchhavis although the details are somewhat different. The Lichchhavis probably helped Chandra Gupta I to capture the kingdom of Magadha from Sundara Varman of Patliputra. Chandra Gupta I presumably started his era in commemoration of this assumption of independent Government with the title of Maharajadhiraja.

The description and the extent of the Gupta empire in its initial stages as it was during the days of Chandra Gupta I is given in the Puranas. Of the three Puranas i.e. the Vayu, the Vishnu and the Bhagwata, the information of the first two may be taken as authentic as these are contemporary records. Vayu Purana has been well preserved in its original form and may be taken as quite trustworthy.

Pargiter thus takes down from Vayu Purana the description of the Gupta Empire :—

"Anu-Gainga (Gaingam)—Prayaganca Saketam Magadhamastatha, Etan janapadan Sarvan bhoksyante Gupta vamsajah."

This has been translated by him as follows :

"Kings born of the Gupta race will enjoy all these territories, namely, along the Ganges, Prayaga, Saketa and the Magadha".

Allan is of the opinion that the above description of the empire related to the period of Chandra Gupta I. From this it becomes clear that the Gupta empire then comprised of Allahabad, Oudh and South Bihar, a respectable empire, to justify the claim of Chandra Gupta I as a Maharajadhiraja.

Dr. Ray Chaudhury holds that the first two Gupta rulers, i.e. Sri Gupta and Ghatotkacha Gupta ruled over Magadha (which was the original state of the Guptas) and territories along the Ganges and that Chandra Gupta I added to this state the territories of Prayaga and Saketa.

This view is supported by the Allahabad Pillar Inscription which does not mention of the conquests of regions extending from Allahabad in the West to the Ganges in the East. On the other hand we have the minutest details of the territories and states of the North which were over-run by Samudra Gupta.

Some writers have attributed even the conquest of the regions of Magadha to Chandra Gupta I, saying that he liberated Magadha from the Scythians after a great fight. This is, however, not supported by any authentic records.

Last days: On the basis of Bhavisya Purana some writers have stated that Chandra Gupta I was murdered by his son Samudra Gupta. This statement, however, does not seem to be correct and was most probably added to the Purana by some later writers. We know it for certain that Samudra Gupta was selected by his father for kingship, he being the fittest prince for the throne.

This, however, does not help to find the last known date of Chandra Gupta I. It is also controversial whether Chandra Gupta I was succeeded by his son Samudra Gupta after the former's death or during his life-time. Dr. Jayaswal thinks that Chandra Gupta I abdicated in favour of his son, Samudra Gupta. Some writers go to the extent of saying that Chandra Gupta was killed in a war and it was in fact during those dark days of his life, before his death, that he appealed to Samudra Gupta to take up the command of the army as well as the reigns of government, as he himself had failed to retrieve the situation.

Some writers suggest that Chandra Gupta I married Kumara Devi presumably in 320 A.D., the beginning of the Gupta era. The appeal to Samudra Gupta to take up the reigns of Government, as the fittest of the princes, could be made only after Chandra Gupta I had seen the mettle of Samudra Gupta in some battle-field. The latter must be quite grown up, and the year of his selection or of his possible accession, must be somewhere near-about 350 A.D.

The assignment of such a long period of government to Chandra Gupta I may be supported on the basis of several conquests which are accredited to him.

This, however, leaves a very short period of government, i.e. only 25 years, to Samudra Gupta as we know it for certain that Chandra Gupta II came to the throne sometime before 380 A.D. In between the two great rulers, Rama Gupta also ruled for a short interval.

The fact that Chandra Gupta I reigned up to 350 A.D. which has been supported by Dr. R.C. Majumdar, however, does not get any confirmation from the other contemporary records. Rather we come across some evidence to the contrary. If we accept the content of Gaya Copper Plate we shall have to take back the last year of rule of Chandra Gupta I to earlier than 328 A.D. The Nalanda Plate further shortens his period of government by three years and we shall have to accept that he ruled for about five years after the Gupta Era and was succeeded by Samudra Gupta in 325 A.D. Therefore, we shall have to conclude that Chandra Gupta I married Kumara Devi presumably much earlier and the Gupta era was started when the joint efforts of the two families led to the establishment of a respectable independent state.

Dr. R.K. Mookerjee thinks that Chandra Gupta I handed over the reigns of Government to Samudra Gupta sometime in 335 A.D. after a rule of about fifteen years as an independent monarch.

This date, although not based on very sound facts, seems to be nearer the truth. This gives a period of 40 years to Samudra Gupta for his long record of victories. This date also leaves a period of about 15 years of rule for Chandra Gupta I for his conquests of Prayaga and Saketa.

GUPTA ERA

Chandra Gupta I was the first Gupta ruler who assumed an independent position. He should, therefore, be regarded as the first ruler of the Imperial Gupta line in

reality. To mark his independence he presumably started the Gupta era. Dr. Fleet was the first writer to put forward this theory. He held that the Gupta era began in 319-20 A.D.—the year of assumption of an independent status by Chandra Gupta I. He based his viewpoint on the statement of Alberuni, viz., that 'the Gupta era was separated from the Saka era by an interval of 241 years'.

Rapson and Ray Chaudhury have proved that the Saka era began in 78 A.D. If this is true it means that the Gupta era began in 319-20 A.D. In fact it is not only the statement of Alberuni on which we can base our assumptions. But we can prove them on the basis of several other contemporary dates of the Saka era and Gupta era—of events and reigns of contemporary monarchs. Dr. V.A. Smith found in this theory a great step towards the settlement of a controversy, which had so far been bewildering and confusing to the students of ancient Indian history. He observed, "A great step in advance was gained by Fleet's determination of the Gupta era which had been the subject of much wild conjectures. His demonstration that the year I of that era is 319-20 A.D. fixed the chronological position of a most important dynasty and reduced chaos to order".

The theory, although so convincing and based on facts and figures, is not undisputed. Dr. Shama Shastri holds that the Gupta era did not begin in 319-20 A.D. and that its first year was 200-201 A.D. Shri Govind Pai holds that the Gupta era began in 272-273 A.D. These views do not find any support either from the modern historians or the contemporary records and stand self-condemned when judged on the basis of different events of the Gupta period.

Dr. Fleet is of the opinion that the Gupta era was in vogue among the Lichchhavis and was adopted by Chandra Gupta after his marriage with queen Kumara Devi. It gained significance under Chandra Gupta I. He is, therefore, known as its founder. Later on, it was adopted by several subordinate chiefs of the Guptas and gained an almost all-India character. The comparison of some years of Gupta era with those of Malva era or Saka era enables us to come

to the conclusion that it was originally started by Chandra Gupta I in 319-20 A.D. although it was kept in abeyance for several decades because we do not find any inscription or coin with the Gupta era till the days of Chandra Gupta II. This has led some writers to presume that it might have been started quite late, with the determination of its first date with the earliest date of the Guptas when they assumed sovereignty.

The theory of Dr. Fleet may be confirmed on the basis of the following historical data :—

In the Mandasor Inscription of Kumara Gupta the date of the Malava year is given as 493. It corresponds to about 436 A.D. as we are told that the Vikramaditya of Malava, who started Malava era, started ruling in 57 B.C. The earlier year of the sovereignty of Kumara Gupta which we are in a position to come across so far is 96th year of the Gupta era. Similarly, the last known date of this ruler in accordance with the Gupta era is 136 on the basis of the dates of the Bhilsad Inscription and a silver coin. Dr Fleet concluded that Kumara Gupta ruled from 414 A.D. to 455 A.D. and as 436 A.D. falls within these two dates and not in the dates at which we can arrive at after making necessary calculations in accordance with the theory of Shri Shama Shastri or Shri Pai, this theory seems more convincing.

It may also be supported on the basis of the recent discovery of a hoard of coins of Svami Rudrasimha who is presumed to be a contemporary of Samudra Gupta. He challenged Samudra Gupta and tried to resist his mighty army but was defeated and overpowered. The last known date of his coins is 274 year of the Saka era which corresponds to 352 A.D., when the power of Samudra Gupta was at its climax and he could be accredited with the extinction of the ruler; his period of reign being 330-375 A.D.

The contention of Fleet also finds support from the Ganjam Plates of Sasanka. We know it for certain that Sasanka was a contemporary of Harsha. He ruled in Bengal and after a diplomatic murder of Rajya Vardhan, the elder brother of Harsha, tried to capture Kanauj. Harsha

ruled from 606-646 A.D. The year of Gupta era, mentioned in Ganjam Plate is 300, which in accordance with Dr. Fleet's theory, corresponds to 619-20 A.D. and thus falls within the reign of Harsha.

Also, we are told that Chandra Gupta II ascended the throne sometime in 375 to 380 A.D. and ruled up to 414 A.D. when he was succeeded by Kumara Gupta I. From the historical records we know that immediately after his accession he had to wage a war on the Saka rulers of the Western India. He defeated them and took up the title of 'Sakari'. The last known date of the Saka era is 304 which corresponds to 382 A.D. The last known date of Chandra Gupta II is 93rd year of the Gupta era which corresponds to 413. A.D. As both the dates fall within the dates assigned to the reign of Chandra Gupta II, and it is only by the fixation of the year 319-20 A.D. as the beginning year of Gupta era, and 78 A.D. as the beginning year of Saka era, we have to accept the viewpoint of Dr. Fleet that the Gupta era commenced in 319-20 A.D. This was also adopted by the ruler of Vallabhi and several other rajas who acknowledged the supremacy of the Imperial Guptas.

It can also be proved on the basis of the rock inscription at Tezpur of Harjaverman and some other evidence which we come across at different places and also from the history of the contemporary period. The Tezpur inscription was inscribed in the year 510 of the Gupta era. Salastambha ruled sometime in 650 A.D. and Harjaverman, who was ninth in the line from Salastambha, should ordinarily have ruled about 180 years later or sometime in 830 A.D. Thus 510th year of the Gupta era was sometime in 830 A.D. or the Gupta era began in 319-320 A.D.

Thus, on the basis of all the above records we can say that the Gupta era commenced in 320 A.D. and most probably Chandra Gupta I was its promulgator.

SAMUDRA GUPTA

At the time of Samudra Gupta's accession India was facing a very critical situation. Not only it was in a dis-

united condition but it was also being ruled by the foreigners not in the interests of its people but for their own personal ends. The Naga rulers like the "snakes", as their name connotes, were busy in sucking the blood of the poor Indians under their heels. The Indians had lost their ancient prestige.

It was in these circumstances that Samudra Gupta appeared on the political platform of India and it would not be incorrect to say that the appearance of this sun led to the dispelling of the alien darkness and ending of the exploitation of the Indians in an atmosphere of anarchy, disorder and disunity. Unlike the contemporary rulers he believed in practical work. He made it clear to his people in his very first declaration as a ruler that it was his aim to liberate the down-trodden Indians from the foreign yoke. In the accomplishment of his grand ideal he was never found wanting in courage and resources. He looked to every Aryan as his subject and took rest only when the whole of Northern India was emancipated.

It is unfortunate that such a great man was completely unknown before the deciphering of the contents of the Allahabad Pillar Inscription. Dr. V.A. Smith was so much impressed by the long list of his victories that he gave him the title of the Indian Napoleon. There are others who rank him even higher than Napoleon. No doubt the area involved in the conquests of Napoleon was greater than that of Samudra Gupta, and while Samudra Gupta was the son of a ruler, Napoleon had risen to the high position from ranks, but the qualities we find in Samudra Gupta definitely surpass those of Napoleon. Both had a nation at their back and had a triumphant military career.

Napoleon was loved by the people of France and his principles of 'Liberty, Equality and Fraternity' were only for France in the later stages, although in the beginning he fought for their universal application. With the march of time his outlook changed. His later struggles were not for these grand ideals but for the glories of France alone. He passionately loved France and exploited other nations with

the help of French resources. Instead of giving liberty to the people of Europe he gave still greater despots. The Spanish example and his egotistic declaration of bringing down the 'Nation of Shopkeepers' in no way leaves behind a good impression. If he was interested in even the French nation he should have tried to improve their lot instead of exploiting them and destroying the other nations of Europe; he instead brought untold miseries upon them. The victories made him a hero of France but it was a short-lived position not based upon sound principles. When he returned from Russia after his defeat the French people who at a time hailed him, turned against him and the very city of Paris, which he had decorated with the rarities of the world closed its gates upon him. The victor of the hundred battles passed the last six painful years of his life as an English prisoner at St. Halena. Why such a great tragic end of a great hero like Napoleon? It was because he set aside the principles of his life after having drunk the cup of intoxicating victories.

It was not the case with Samudra Gupta. He never exploited the defeated nations. He had set principles and a marked policy which he pursued. He had before him the goal of the emancipation of India which he achieved through his victories over the 21 rulers of Northern and Southern India. According to Aiyangar it is most unjust to compare him with Napoleon who regarded mere military conquests as the duty of the kings. Samudra Gupta's actions—military and diplomatic—were all well-regulated. His policy of peace and reconciliation, his colonial policy and administration, his emphasis on the defence of the sea frontiers, his philanthropy, and his dealings with people are the characteristics of lofty and magnanimous personality of Samudra Gupta, both as a man and as a king. Samudra Gupta never became a militarist in the real sense of the term.

Allahabad Pillar Inscription

This undated inscription, which was removed from Kausambhi to its present place by Akbar the Great, is a

monument commemorating the glorious achievements of Samudra Gupta, both in the fields of peace and war.

But for its discovery Samudra Gupta would have gone down in history as merely a name without the detail of his achievements. The pillar is unique in that it describes the greatness of the two rulers, Asoka and Samudra Gupta, which they attained by following the two different principles i.e. of 'non-violence' and 'war and aggression' respectively.

It is non-sectarian in character. It can be relied upon as authentic, as its author, Harisena, was a minister of peace and war in his government. Most probably he accompanied the ruler in all his wars and thus was an eye-witness to his victories. It is rather unfortunate that the author, instead of giving elaborate details of his different wars, lays more stress on the description of such qualities of the king as are not very useful to the students of history. He proves himself more a scholar and a poet than a historian. He could have given more details about the Indian chiefs subdued by Samudra Gupta. The inscription is both in prose and verse. The information which we gather may be given line-wise as below :—

The author starts with a brief description of the early life of the emperor. Some parts of the earlier lines are broken. Possibly they described his early education and some battles which he fought as a prince.

In line 5 he has been praised for his learning. He is described as a great scholar, keen to enjoy the company of the poets and scholars.

Line 7 gives a vivid picture of his selection, by his father and his court, as a successor. Some writers (on the literal interpretation of this line) hold the view that Chandra Gupta I abdicated in favour of his son Samudra Gupta. A picture is also drawn of disappointment and jealousy of rival princes, who in spite of their equal rights, were ignored. The royal courtiers have, however, been shown as rejoicing this event, being very much satisfied at this selection.

In line 9 people's satisfaction, love and happiness has been shown for his military achievements which were of an immortal nature. A mention is also made of the surrender of some chieftains, who after their subjugation paid him homage.

Line 11 acquaints us with his determination for the subjugation of the evil-doers. Their defeat led no doubt to their humiliation but inwardly they remained offended for some time. The benign nature and kindness of Samudra Gupta, however, changed their hearts. They sincerely regretted their past misdeeds and repented over their hostile attitude.

In line 13 are mentioned the names of the three Naga rulers, i.e. Achyuta, Naga Sena and Ganapati Naga who offered a united resistance against him but were completely routed and exterminated.

In line 15 Samudra Gupta has been praised for his scholarly and poetic qualities. He has also been described as a great religious leader. In short, he was an embodiment of all virtues and remains an idol for meditation of those who can understand his merit and intellect.

The seventeenth line gives an indication of his having fought many battles. His body was covered with many scars which had been caused by the blows of battle-axes, arrows, spears, pikes, barbed darts and many other weapons of war.

Line 19 gives a long list of the twelve Southern kings, who after their defeat and surrender, were restored to their respective territories. This enhanced his prestige, as liberation and restoration after a defeat was a unique act.

Line 21 indicates the names of the nine unfortunate North Indian kings who were dealt with severely. After their defeat they were not restored to their respective territories. Their states were annexed to the Gupta empire presumably with the idea of providing the people of these territories with a better government. An indication of the

submission of the forest chiefs has also been given in this line.

Line 22 contains a detailed list of the frontier and the republican states, which accepted Samudra Gupta's supremacy without a war, and agreed to pay to him the customary homage and tribute.

Line 23 describes such far off frontier rulers who respected him for his prowess and maintained friendly relations with him, sent him presents of beautiful maidens and placed at his disposal all such pleasures of life, as were available to them. Samudra Gupta has also been described in this line as the generator of good and the destroyer of evil.

In line 26 he has been praised as the saviour of the miserable, poor, destitute and the afflicted of the mankind. He was always thinking of the betterment of such people. His officers were employed to restore the prosperity in the regions of the conquered kings. He has also been compared with Indra (the god of heaven), Dhanada (the god of wealth), Antaka (the god of death) and Varuna (the god of sea).

In line 27 he has been compared with Kashyap, Narada and Tumburu for his musical accomplishments. They paled into insignificance when compared to his talent. The learned people and poets flocked around him and acknowledged his supremacy in the art of poetry and learning.

Line 28 gives the details of his ancestors and the status enjoyed by them. It is very useful to determine their history and their position which, but for this line, would have remained elusive.

In line 29 the author, after describing his war-like qualities, mentions Samudra Gupta's departure from this world. The place selected for him by the author, which he deserved, has been described as the abode of Indra.

Line 30 tells about his qualities of head and heart. He was not only tolerant in his religious policy, but was also a great lover of wars and literary books. His fame travelled far and wide and had a soothing effect on the hearts of the people like the holy water of the Ganges.

Line 31 gives the name of the author. The mention of Chandra Gupta II in line 33 leads one to conclude that it was a posthumous inscription.

His Succession

As has been stated in the beginning, India was passing through troubled times at the time of accession of Samudra Gupta. Dr. Jayaswal says that the fortunes of the Guptas had reached at their lowest ebb with Chandra Gupta I having been ousted from his kingdom and his repeated failures to retrieve the situation and get back his lost kingdom. He had tears in his eyes when he handed over the charge of the kingdom to Samudra Gupta after the latters' selection as the successor with the approval of the council. From this statement it also becomes clear that Samudra Gupta presumably succeeded his father during the latter's life-time, he having abdicated in favour of Samudra Gupta, saying, "You now, my noble Sir, be the King (protect the kingdom)." Dr. Chhabra has supported the view regarding the abdication of Chandra Gupta I in favour of Samudra Gupta, on the basis of the literal interpretation of the seventh line of the inscription. Another important point to be borne in mind is that the selection of Samudra Gupta from amongst his children was made by Chandra Gupta I although he was not the eldest, taking into consideration his past record of victories and capability of handling complicated and critical problems. Harisena thus described this event in the Allahabad Pillar Inscription; "Who being scanned at, with looks of gloom and envy by those rejected, despite their equal birth, while the attendants of the court heaved deep sighs of relief manifesting their happiness—was selected by his father who exclaimed "Verily he is worthy". He embraced him with hair standing erect—symptomatic of the happiness and sentiments. He looked at him repeatedly with affection and tears of joy, which expressed his noble nature and happiness at the right selection. He is to govern, of a surety, the whole world".

Harisena takes pains to draw the vivid scene of the royal court when Samudra Gupta was selected both by

the king and his council but he does not mention the date or the year when this great event took place. He thus confirms the verdict of the writers that the Indians were very careless about the dates of their history and leave us groping in the dark for the determination of his year of succession. Writers have tried to draw different conclusions about the date of his accession and the period of his rule, on the basis of different historical events and the two questions have become so controversial that no final decision can be arrived at.

Dr. R.K. Mookerjee writes that if 308 A.D. is roughly taken as the year of the matrimonial alliance between the Guptas and the Lichchhavis, and Samudra Gupta is presumed to be the eldest son, then assuming his age at the time of his accession as 25 Samudra Gupta could be said to have ascended the throne sometime in 335 A.D. He ruled for about 45 years (380 A.D. being the date of Chandra Gupta's accession to the Gupta throne) and thus his reign-period ranged between 335 A.D. and 380 A.D. According to Dr. R.C. Majumdar Samudra Gupta ascended the throne sometime between 340 A.D. and 350 A.D.

The Nalanda Plate, however, provides quite a different evidence. In accordance with it Samudra Gupta must have been ruling in 325 A.D., as it states that he had commenced his government before the fifth year of the Gupta era. A set of historians has probed further into this problem. They hold that the Gupta era commenced in fact with the accession of Samudra Gupta. Thus he must have ascended the throne in 320 A.D.

Immediately after his accession he had to face a revolt led by his elder brother, Kaca, who felt dissatisfied with the decision of his father and the council. However, he was defeated.

No more information concerning him is available after this incident. Some of the writers, however, disagree with this view and think that Kaca was the original name of Samudra Gupta and he took up the title of Samudra Gupta after the expansion of his empire up to the 'Samundra' or

Sea. They are of the opinion that the Gupta empire suffered an eclipse at the end of the reign of Chandra Gupta I or in the beginning of the rule of Samudra Gupta at the hands of the Vakatakas. The trial for supremacy had been going on between the Guptas and Vakatakas for the last many years. Although in the beginning the Vakatakas enjoyed pretty strong and supreme position, in the end they collapsed and Samudra Gupta compelled Rudrasena I to submit and accept him as his overlord.

His Wars

The wars of Samudra Gupta may conveniently be divided into three phases, Wars in the North, Wars in the South and Wars in the North against recalcitrant rulers. His policy of conquest has been classified by H.G. Rawlinson under the following four heads :—"Kings who were slain and their dominions annexed; kings who were defeated and taken prisoners, but re-instated as tributaries; frontier kings, who escaped by paying homage and "distant kings" who sent embassies acknowledging his power".

It is from the study of the Allahabad Pillar Inscription edited by Harisena, who was also Samudra Gupta's minister for peace and war, and is presumed to have accompanied him in all his campaigns and was thus an authentic eyewitness of all his victories, that we come to know of the names of the rulers who were either ruthlessly exterminated or after their defeat and capture, restored to their respective territories. It is unfortunate that Harisena did not give more details about the rulers or their struggles which he could conveniently give, had he so desired, and contented himself merely with making a mention of their names in the inscription.

The names of the rulers of the North who were defeated and exterminated by Samudra Gupta have been mentioned in lines 13 and 21 which are as follows :

Line 13 "Unassisted by any body, with the boundless prowess of his own arm, he uprooted Achyuta and

Naga Sena, and captured him, who was born in the family of the Kotas, being attracted by the city that had the name of Pushpa."

Line 21 "His regal splendour only added colours by the ruthless extermination of Rudra Deva, Matila, Nagadatta, Chandra Varman, Ganapati Naga, Nagasena, Achyuta, Nandi, Bala Verman and many other kings of Aryavarta—and the overthrow of the kings of the forests into servitude."

In line 13 a mention of only three Naga rulers has been made. They were perhaps the first group of rulers who had to face the prowess of his arms. The combined armies of the three rulers most probably met Samudra Gupta near Kausambhi where the pillar inscription was installed. They were defeated. This victory was a turning point in Samudra Gupta's career. We also find a mention of the destruction of Nagasena in 'Harsha Charitra.' The passage goes thus, "At Padmavati occurred the doom of Nagasena born of the Naga family who was foolish enough to have the secrets of his policy discussed in the presence of the Sarika bird which declared them aloud" (Sudhakar Chattopadhya).

Dr. V.A. Smith writes, "The greater part of these Northern conquests must have been completed and subju-gat ed territories absorbed, before Samudra Gupta ventured to undertake the invasion of the kingdom of the South, a task which demanded uncommon boldness in design, and masterly powers of organisation and execution".

This policy of ruthless extermination may not appeal to a general reader who would have formed a very high opinion about Samudra Gupta. But a critical study of the circumstances under which Samudra Gupta had to adopt this ruthless policy would justify his approach.

1. Samudra Gupta was determined to liberate Aryavarta from the foreign domination. He had also resolved to give it unity and a benign and national government. This could only be possible after the total extinction of small

principalities which obstructed his policy of unifying the people of India so essential for the development of their prosperity.

2. Although it was a part of his cherished dream, Samudra Gupta did not annex Southern India into his empire, fearing that it might be difficult for him to maintain an effective control over these far-flung areas. There was, however, no such problem in Northern India. He was pretty sure that he could effectively control the Northern regions.

3. The third factor which made him follow this high-handed policy was that the three Naga rulers after their defeat near Kausambhi would not feel contented in casting their lot at the mercy of Samudra Gupta. Taking advantage of his absence in the South they broke into an open revolt. They went further and swelled the ranks of his enemies by joining them openly in the war in which Samudra Gupta was involved immediately after his return from the South. Thus Samudra Gupta was justified to take these extreme steps, which in the normal circumstances could not be expected from a person of his nature.

4. The fourth factor was that he maintained a grand army. Its maintenance required huge expenditure. To be satisfied with the mere state of Magadha under his direct control, with all the North Indian states nominally acknowledging his supremacy with an internal autonomous set-up, was not expedient politically. These states, with their resources fully at their disposal, could at any time break their connections with him and thus create situation which had been controlled earlier after intensive warfare.

The author of the Allahabad Inscription thus justifies the policy of his master : "Who abounded in majesty that had been increased by violently exterminating Rudra Deva, . . . and 8 other kings of Northern India." He finds in their ruthless extermination the end of a tyrannical rule and the beginning of a better government. The people of the liberated regions rejoiced his victory and his policy further enhanced his prestige.

His southern campaign is without a parallel in the history of India. Line 19, which runs as follows, gives us a list of the 12 Southern kings, who tried to stop the ever-victorious army of Samudra Gupta :

Line 19 "The great fortune of his career attained the pinnacle of glory by his far sighted policy of liberation, after subjugation of Mahendra of Kosala, Vyaghraraja of Maha Kantara, Mantaraja of Kerala, Mahendra of Pishtapura, Swami Dutta of Kottura on the hill, Damana of Erandapala, Vishnu Gopa of Kanchi, Nilaraja of Avamukta, Hastiverman of Vengi, Ugrasena of Palukka, Kubera of Devarasthra, Dhanamjaya of Kushthalapur and all the other kings of the southern regions."

As is clear from this line of the inscription after capturing the Southern kings in the battle-field Samudra Gupta set them at liberty. This enhanced his prestige further.

Dr. Ray Chaudhary has described his policy in the North as that of a "Digvijayi" or "Conqueror of quarters" of the early Magadhan type and in the south he followed the Kautilyan ideal of a "Dharma Vijayi" or "Righteous conqueror".

Samudra Gupta deserves praise for his far-sighted policy. Later events confirmed the soundness of his policy. Muslim rulers, who tried to maintain their hold over Southern India from their headquarters in the North, failed. One of them even went to the extent of shifting his capital to a central place, like Daulatabad but his plans did not bring any good results. Another spent the last 25 years of his life in the Deccan but failed—'failed grandly', according to Lane-Poole. According to Dr. V.A. Smith, Samudra Gupta returned from the South in 350 A.D 'laden with golden booty, like the Mohammadan adventurer, who performed the same military exploits nearly a thousand years later.'

We have studied the policy of Samudra Gupta, both in the North and the South, i.e. total extermination of the 9 kings of the North mentioned in Line 13 and 21 respectively and the annexation of their kingdoms in his empire, and the liberation of 12 Southern kings after their defeat and

capture when they had acknowledged his supremacy. His policy towards the 'Frontier kings and Republican tribes' is described in the Line 22 of the Allahabad Pillar Inscription as follows :—

Translation :

"His imperial status was fully acknowledged without any demur, by giving all kinds of taxes, abiding with his orders, and paying homage by the frontier kings of Samatata, Devaka, Kamarupa, Nepala, Kartripura and other (neighbouring states) and by Malavas, Arjunayanas, Yaudheyas, Madrakas, Abhiras, Prarjunas, Sanakanikas, Kakas and Kharaparikas."

About this policy, Dr. V.A. Smith has commented that "the paternal preference was abundantly justified by the young king, who displayed a degree of skill in the art of both peace and war which entitles him to high rank among the most illustrious sovereigns of India".

Samudra Gupta maintained very cordial relations with the distant kings like the Sassanian king of Persia and the rulers of China, Rome and East Indies. Dr. R.C. Majumdar, on the basis of a Javanese text, named Tantri Kamandaka, has stated that Maharaja Aisvaryapala of the Iksvaker race traced his ancestory to the family of Samudra Gupta.

Extent of Empire

Samudra Gupta had the strength to annex the whole of Northern and Southern India into his empire. However he seems to have preferred a more farsighted policy and felt contented with the total extermination of independent states in Aryavarta only. The rulers of Southern India were restored their territories after their defeat. The Frontier kings and Republican states were won over by him by alliance, which gave him powers to arrange for their defence and made them subordinate to his power.

The empire directly administered by him thus comprised the whole of Northern India excluding Western Punjab,

Kashmir, Western Rajputana, Sind, Gujarat and Orissa. In the Allahabad Pillar Inscription, Samudra Gupta has been compared with the god Varuna (god of water) which led some of the writers to conclude that perhaps his empire extended from the Western to the Eastern Sea. This is not correct as the conquest of the extreme Western regions i.e., Gujarat, was accomplished by his successor, Chandra Gupta II.

Describing the extent of his empire, Dr. V.A. Smith says that "the dominion under the direct government of Samudra Gupta in the middle of the fourth century thus comprised all the most populous and fertile countries of Northern India. It extended from the Brahamputra in the East to the Jamuna and the Chambal in the West; and from the foot of the Himalayas in the North to the Narmada in the South. Beyond these wide limits, the frontier kingdoms of the Assam and the Gangetic delta as well as those on the Southern slopes of the Himalayas and the free tribes of Rajputana and Malawa were attached to the empire by bonds of supporting-alliance while almost all the kingdoms of the South had been over-run by the emperor's armies and compelled to acknowledge his irresistible might".

Thus, we can say that the empire of Samudra Gupta comprised a much larger area, in case we include in it all such states as were bound together, under his supremacy, by alliances, as compared to the directly administered area. It was perhaps second to Asoka only in its vastness in the Hindu period.

Samudra Gupta and Sri Meghavarman of Ceylon

Samudra Gupta knit the frontier states into a long line of political alliances and ambassadorial ties and thus safeguarded his vast empire from a possible foreign invasion. How he developed his relations with Ceylon speaks for his farsightedness and its details should not pass unnoticed.

From time immemorial India had maintained cultural and religious ties with Ceylon. Asoka converted the Ceylo-

nese to Buddhism with the help of Buddhist Missionaries. Buddhist pilgrims flocked every year to the places of pilgrimage in India. Samudra Gupta was very anxious to maintain friendly relations with such neighbouring states as he could not bring under his control directly. King Sri Meghavarman of Ceylon too was keen to develop friendly relations with Samudra Gpta, firstly for his power and empire and secondly to gain some facilities for the Buddhist pilgrims visiting centres of Buddhism in India. This mutual self-interestedness culminated into a political alliance. The Allahabad Pillar stands a witness to this political alliance wherein it is stated that Samudra Gupta received gifts and presents from the people of Simhala and all the dwellers on the islands.

It is said that when the younger brother of the Ceylonese king visited Indian holy places, particularly Bodh Gaya, he could not get a place of comfort to stay. He complained of this difficulty to his brother, the Ceylonese king. This difficulty had been experienced by the other Buddhist monks also who visited India earlier. The Ceylonese king sent an embassy to the royal Gupta court, with presents and gifts for the king. The purpose behind this mission was to procure for the Ceylonese pilgrims, visiting India, some concessions and also to get a permission for the building of a monastery at Bodh Gaya for Ceylonese pilgrims. This afforded a chance to Samudra Gupta to cement and develop friendly relations with the Ceylonese king. He readily consented. The importance of this friendly tie can be well imagined from the fact that the Gupta king was meticulous to have it mentioned in the Allahabad Pillar Inscription. This speaks volumes of his broadmindedness and tolerance in his religious outlook. Hieun Tsang, who visited India during the reign of Harsha made a mention of this monastery in his account of Bodh Gaya. Mr. Rawlinson has described it in his short cultural History of India, as a splendid building with six halls and three lofty towers, surrounded by a wall thirty or forty feet high. It was decorated in brilliant colours, and contained an image of the Buddha, cast in gold and silver, and adorned with gems and

precious stones. It accommodated more than one thousand monks.

As a General

Samudra Gupta was a born soldier. One of the most important factors for his ever victorious record was that like Nepoleon he always personally led his army in the battle-field. In Line 17 of the Inscription it has been stated that "He was dexterous in waging hundreds of battles with the only strength of his famous prowess of arms. The beauty of his charming body was enhanced by the multiplicity of the confused wounds caused by the blows of battle-axes, arrows, spears, pikes, barbed darts, swords, lances, javelins, iron arrows, vaitastikas and many other weapons." The numerous wounds on his body have been compared to the stars of the sky.

Another notable feature of his military career was that he did not believe in entering into diplomatic alliances or other military pacts of the modern times. He always depended on the strength of his army and his personal prowess. He out-shone Alexander (who had to wait for weeks on the bank of Jehlum before a struggle with Poros) when he crossed the flooded Ganges to meet the confederacy of the Naga rulers in the face of their stiff resistance. He was never found wanting in courage and his tiger-slayer type of coins not only speak for his physical strength but also indicate his resoluteness even in the face of a tiger.

With all his warlike qualities, unlike other great conquerors he was never moved by the lust of acquisition of more territories. His policy of annexation and extermination was confined to the boundaries of Aryavarta and once he had unified Aryavarta of his conception which extended from the Himalayas in the North to Vindhyas in the South and from the Western to the Eastern seas, he never thought of further annexing even an inch of land to his territories in spite of temptations. He even went to the extent of restoring the territories of the defeated rulers. With the strength of his arms he could afford a march over the Middle

East countries like Persia, which had been greatly weakened, and get his name enlisted among the great generals like Alexander and Napoleon but he never cherished this ideal. We, therefore, cannot label him as a militarist like Napoleon and others. He always avoided bloodshed and his policy towards the Southern kings as well as the frontier chiefs supports this view.

His horse-sacrifice, which he performed after his victories in the North and the South, speaks for the supreme position which he had attained by dint of his valour and courage. His career was a long struggle. The Allahabad Pillar Inscription tells us that Samudra Gupta was a great warrior and a very determined and resolute general. The tiger-slayar type coins confirm this statement. But once he had fulfilled his cherished ideal instead of resting on his laurels the rest of his life, he took to other spheres of state activities. He gave to the people a long spell of peace and personally took interest in the development of the country in the different fields of activities which were the natural outcome of prosperity. Art and culture thrived under the progressive government.

As a Diplomat

Samudra Gupta was not only a great warrior but also a far-sighted diplomat. Unassisted by any other ruler, he fought all his battles. Perhaps, he is without a parallel in the history of India to reduce to a subordinate alliance, rulers, who, if handled recklessly or tactlessly, would have proved very troublesome to the great monarch. His relations with the five frontier kings and the republican states is another instance of his skill as a diplomat. Even the Kushan rulers of the frontier posts, the Sassanian king of Persia and the rulers of Ceylon and East Indies could have proved troublesome, or at least could ignore him and save themselves from subordinate alliance with him. Samudra Gupta tackled every rival chief after making full assessment of his worth and importance. He found the Northern kings too treacherous to be spared. Southern states were

too far off to be controlled effectively. Subjects of 'republican states' were too independent-loving to be kept under control peacefully : they were permitted to enjoy internal autonomy. He found the frontier kings too good and submissive to be drawn into a war. With the far-off states like Ceylon and Persia he was content to have ambassadorial ties. The proof of the pudding lies in its eating. Samudra Gupta's foreign policy stood well this saying and proved beyond any shadow of doubt the soundness of his diplomatic relations. Dr. R.C. Majumdar has summed up his statesmanship. He says that Samudra Gupta had the vision of an all-India empire. He strengthened his position by annexing the North Indian states and thus ensured peace, which was not possible without their total extinction. For the outlying kingdoms he used a different rod, as a similar approach would have antagonised them. He did give them internal autonomy but controlled their foreign policy so thoroughly that they could not sow the seeds of discord in the political affairs of India.

As a Scholar and a Poet

Samudra Gupta, unlike other great warriors, was a man of letters. From the Allahabad Pillar Inscription we know that he was a very learned scholar. His policy of encouragement of the learned people, which was also followed by his successor Chandra Gupta II, led to the growth of drama, poetry and other literary pursuits of the time. India can boast of several literary figures of that period who contributed a lot to the development of the Indian culture. Harisena, his minister for peace and war, was himself a great poet and scholar. He pays a glowing tribute to Samudra Gupta's qualities of head and heart in Line 5 of the Allahabad Pillar Inscription as follows :

Translation :

"Whose happy mental disposition was always to mix with the learned people and remain the supporter of the real truth of scriptures, firmly fixed (in the tenets). Having

overcome those destructive forces, which mar the beauty of excellent poetry, by the aegis and inspiration imbibed from the collective wisdom of his erudite men, he shines as a luminary of meridian splendour in the firmament of the wise by much of poetry (of excellence) and of clear meaning."

Some writers have shown their reluctance to see eye to eye with this line on the plea that there is nothing on record to prove the truth of this statement. Neither there is some poetical composition of Samudra Gupta available to us as such nor has any of his couplets been quoted by some contemporary or later poet in his works. Harisena complimented him in this manner perhaps only because he was his court poet and wanted to present him in the best possible colours.

As a Musician

Samudra Gupta has also been complimented by Harisena for his musical accomplishments. He has been stated to be a past master of music. He has been compared with Kasyapa (the guru of Indra) and Narada and Tumburu for his musical qualities in Line 27 which runs as follows:—

Translation :

"Kasyapa, the guru of Indra (the lord of gods) Tumburu and Narada (famous for their musical accomplishments) and others, paled into insignificance by his sharp and cultured intellect and musical talents. By virtue of his various exquisite poems, he reigned supreme as the king of poets among the learned people whose main-stay was poetry. Really his wonderful and noble deeds are worthy to be cherished and praised for-ever."

His lyrist type of coins, wherein he has been shown as playing on a veena, confirm the views expressed by Harisena. But for the conventional doubts of the likely exaggeration there is no evidence to disprove his praise for the king 'that he put to shame Narada and Tumburu by his creditable and envious position in the art of music'.

General Remarks

Samudra Gupta has also been admired for his sympathy for the afflicted, down-trodden and the depressed people. He was always responsive to the oppressed and never failed to redress their grievances. Behind his iron coat of armour, he had a sympathetic heart for the poor and afflicted people. He was of a very kind and generous nature and one of the chief causes of the total extermination of Northern states was that their rulers were oppressive and the subjects were crushed under their tyrannical rule. His benign government gave prosperity and a national feeling to the people.

Samudra Gupta succeeded in restoring mutual unity and consciousness which had been sadly lacking due to a long foreign domination in India. As is evident from his title 'Samudra' he seems to have really ruled over an empire which extended fròm the Western to the Eastern seas. The expansion of the empire to the seas gave a fillip to the international trade of the country. Fahien, who visited India during the days of his successor, writes very favourably of the Indian trade with the countries in the East and to the West of India. Indian commodities had a very favourable market everywhere in the world.

Economic Conditions

The subjects of Samudra Gupta enjoyed an economic prosperity, never known to their predecessors due to a stable and sound currency.

Although a child of the Brahmanic revolution Samudra Gupta was still a very tolerant king. His literary and cultured disposition had broadened his outlook. As is evident from his coins, he was a worshipper of the Hindu gods. But we have yet to come across even a case of his indifference or partiality to the other religions. At times, he set apart money for the religious leaders of both the Hinduism and the Buddhism. The Allahabad Pillar Inscription, while making a mention of his philanthropic activities, tells us

that he was a giver of thousands of cows which had been acquired legally. He readily acceded to the request of the Ceylonese king for the building of a monastery at Gaya for the Buddhist pilgrims from Ceylon.

Samudra Gupta raised the prestige of the country in the eyes of the foreigners by the establishment of a strong government within the country. So advanced in education and culture became the Indians that the foreigners flocked to the Indian universities for higher education.

RAMA GUPTA

The Gupta history of the period from the death of Samudra Gupta in 370 A.D. to the accession of Chandra Gupta II in 376 A.D., is shrouded with mystery. Who succeeded Samudra Gupta? Chandra Gupta II has been proved to be the immediate successor of Samudra Gupta by some of the scholars on the basis of the 8th line of Mathura Stone Inscription of Chandra Gupta II which reads as follows :—

"By him, who is the son, accepted by him (and) begotten on the Mahadevi Dutta Devi, of the Maharajadhiraja (the glorious Samudra Gupta)".

The contemporary literary record, Devi Chandra Guptam, however, gives us quite a different picture.

In this drama, which was written by Visakha Dutta, who is also the author of famous 'Mudra Rakshasa', we are told that immediately after his accession to the throne, Rama Gupta had to wage a war with the Saka ruler of Malwa (some hold that he was a ruler of Mathura). He was, however, defeated and compelled to surrender his wife, Dhruva Devi, to the Saka ruler. This action of the king had the approval of his minister, but the queen was very perturbed when she came to know of this humiliating condition of the treaty of peace. Annoyed she called the king heartless and coward. He, in turn, justified his action. The younger brother of Rama Gupta, Chandra Gupta, risked his life to save the honour of the family. Presumably, he was approached by his sister-in-law, queen Dhruva Devi

in the matter and he planned to save her honour. He went in disguise as Dhruva Devi to the camp of the Saka chief. It is stated that Dhruva Devi (actually Chandra Gupta) wrote to the Saka chief that she would be accompanied by retinue of her maid-servants and other good-looking ladies befitting the dignity of a great and beautiful queen and in accordance with custom. This was readily accepted by the Saka chief. Chandra Gupta (in the guise of Dhruva Devi) accompanied by 500 beautiful maidens (but actually young brave soldiers) who were carried by another two thousand soldiers in 'dolis' entered the camp of the Saka chief. The Saka chief was so jubilant and happy over his success that he forgot to take precautions against any possible danger to his life. This lapse cost him his life.

The incident has been narrated even by Bana in his 'Harsha Charitra'. He writes, "Chandra Gupta II, in the guise of a female, assassinated the Saka king, possessed of lust for another's wife at his very camp" or to put it more clearly, the Saka king was killed while courting the wife of another person. Sankar Arya, the commentator on 'Harsha Charitra', makes this reference of Bana clearer by stating that the Sakapati was killed in private by Chandra Gupta disguised as his brother's wife and surrounded by men, dressed like women.

This incident was a turning point in the career of Chandra Gupta. He became famous by the title of 'Sakari' and received appreciation from the queen and the people. They hailed him as a great hero. This bravery and boldness, however, cost him very dearly in the initial stages. Rama Gupta could not tolerate the popularity of his younger brother. Consequently, relations between them got estranged. Chandra Gupta had thus no option but to quit the royal court and to stay away from the busy life of the capital. He passed a few years of his life in seclusion. One after-noon in the absence of royal guards, he entered the palace, murdered his brother, ascended the throne and married Dhruva Devi.

We get a similar version in 'Mujmalu-t-Twarikh', an Arabic folklore, translated in Persian by Abdul Hasan Ali

in 1226 A.D. Rama Gupta has been named in this book as Rawal and Chandra Gupta as Barkamaris. The story is somewhat akin to the one narrated by Visakhadutta in Devi Chandra Guptam. Some hill chieftain had revolted against Rawal's authority. Some historians have identified this rebel chief with the hill chief of Kangra. Others place him somewhere in the hilly regions of Shivalik. This annoyed Rama Gupta who had succeeded to the mighty kingdom of Samudra Gupta. He marched at the head of a grand army to subdue and punish the rebel. Unfortunately, the royal forces could not pierce through the defences of the rebel chief and had no other alternative but to fall back. The losses on the Gupta side were very heavy. This gave an opportunity to the enemy. Encouraged by this turn of the tide in their favour, the rebel forces chased the Gupta army. Accompanied by his officers and family, Rama Gupta shut himself up in a fort in the hills. Strategically a blunder, this provided an easy trap for him. He had to surrender unconditionally. Thereupon, he was asked to surrender the queen and other ladies to the rebel chief—the most humiliating terms of peace. However, Chandra Gupta II, then a prince, rose to the occasion and submitted his plan to the king wherein he volunteered to save the royal camp from this catastrophe. According to this plan the prince was to go to the enemy's camp in the guise of Dhruva Devi. He was to be accompanied by all the youths of the royal camp disguised as maidens. The plan succeeded and the hill chief was annihilated.

After this incident, however, Rama Gupta became very unpopular. His weakness and cowardice were of the lowest order. Chandra Gupta, on the other hand, gained popularity. This annoyed Rama Gupta. Chandra Gupta thought it politic to quit the royal court for a brief interval.

One summer afternoon he returned to the capital as a mad man, hardly recognised by any body. He went to the royal palace where be found the gates unguarded, as the guards were taking a nap. He went in and found his brother and queen Dhruva Devi chewing sugar-cane. He was also offered one and with that also a knife. This gave

him a long-waited opportunity and he killed his brother with the same knife. Dhruva Devi did not raise any alarm. Perhaps, since the incident in the hill fort, she had taken a fancy to Chandra Gupta. The death of Rama Gupta was welcomed by the people as this brought to an end a cruel, coward and vaccilating ruler, who had treated the honour of his family so lightly. The accession of Chandra Gupta was a great event as with it were revived old glories of adventures, victories and prosperity, associated with the reign of Samudra Gupta.

Perhaps Rama Gupta is the most controversial figure among the Gupta rulers. Some writers have gone to the extent of saying that there was no king at all among the Gupta rulers bearing the name of Rama Gupta and the one, who is a controversial identity, was either some chief of Malwa or Mathura or his name has not been correctly deciphered. Dr. Bhandarkar thinks that 'Ra' of Rama, if studied very closely, seems to be 'Ka' and 'Ma' was most probably 'Ca'. He, therefore, opines that 'Kaca Gupta' has been read erroneously as 'Rama Gupta', who was either a rival of Samudra Gupta for the accession to the Gupta throne or Samudra Gupta himself. This was his original name and the title 'Samudra' was adopted by him after the extension of his empire to the seas. Dr. Jayaswal is, however, of the opinion that 'Rama Gupta' and 'Kaca Gupta' were two names of the same person. It is very difficult to agree with this view as 'Rama Gupta' and 'Kaca Gupta' the two controversial personalities stand in history like two poles apart. Rama Gupta, from all available records, seems to have been a very weak and coward king, who even agreed to surrender his wife to a Saka chief. From the records of 'Kaca Gupta', however, we gather that he was an exterminator of all kings. Thus the two names cannot be mistaken for one personality.

In 'Devi Chandra Guptam' (the solitary record at our disposal for this controversial ruler) Rama Gupta has been described only once. The drama which was written by Visakhadutta, gives us a long dialogue between Rama Gupta and Dhruva Devi. It does not anywhere specifically

mention that Rama Gupta was the successor or inheritor of the vast fortunes of Samudra Gupta. Bana also makes a casual reference of the murder of a Saka chief by Chandra Gupta II. The marriage of Chandra Gupta II with Dhruva Devi, the widow of his elder brother, is perhaps nowhere mentioned in the contemporary records and seems to be the outcome of fertile imagination of some later writers who added many new details and wrote as they felt and had gathered from the folk-tales.

First of all there is a controversy about the rebel chief and the location of his state. There is also a difference of opinion about the place of action. Dr. Altekar has presumed that Rama Gupta, to excel his father in conquests of territories, invaded the territories of Piro the Kidara Kushana king of Western Punjab but was signally defeated and compelled to flee. Probably he took refuge in a Himalayan fort where he was besieged by the pursuing conqueror. The beleaguered force was reduced to a desperate situation. The only way to effect an escape appeared to be to accept ignominious peace terms dictated by the conqueror, who demanded, *interalia*, the surrender of the Gupta Queen.

In this statement we find three notable points, viz. :—

(*i*) That Rama Gupta wanted to excel his father by achieving fresh conquests and thus invaded the territories of the Kushan king.

(*ii*) That he was defeated and compelled to take shelter in a Himalayan fort.

(*iii*) That he agreed to surrender his queen Dhruva Devi to the Kushan king.

Rama Gupta has been described by all the writers, as a weak king. His defeat and later acceptance of the surrender of his wife is perhaps the biggest proof of this fact. It is surprising that Dr. Altekar, in the same para, has given two diametrically opposite points. At the outset, he has presumed that Rama Gupta wanted to outshine his father Samudra Gupta in his military achievements and, therefore, invaded the territories of a Kushan king. Even if we presume him to be so ambitious, the later events do not justify

this contention. Had Rama Gupta been really a general of the calibre of his father, or had he even a little bit of experience in the warfare, he would not have acted so rashly and like an inexperienced person had nothing in reserve. His army would not have been so weak that after a failure to break through the defence of his enemy he had nothing left to take a stand before a petty chieftain. Rama Gupta had succeeded to the vast fortunes of Samudra Gupta. Naturally, he must have had under his command the great generals, officers and soldiers who had seen hundreds of battles during the period of his father and were thus experienced in the art of warfare. If we presume for a moment that Rama Gupta did not have an experience of the warfare at least those experienced men were there to advise him and to guide him from falling so easy a prey into the hands of a chieftain !

Another feature which stands out is that Chandra Gupta, who later proved himself second to none in the art of warfare, was all along with the army. Yet he did not give the benefit of his advice to his brother at the proper time.

Rama Gupta, if he was really so chivalrous and courageous, would not have agreed to the surrender of his wife. On the other hand, if he was weak and coward, how did then he manage to succeed Samudra Gupta, especially when Chandra Gupta during the life-time of his father had been selected to become the king. Even if we presume that Rama Gupta ascended the throne after justifying his claim, it seems very unlikely that a strong prince like Chandra Gupta could have remained contented to play a second fiddle to Rama Gupta.

That Rama Gupta did not succeed Samudra Gupta becomes clear both from the Allahabad Pillar Inscription and the Mathura Stone Inscription of Chandra Gupta II. It is clearly indicated thereon that he was selected from among the royal princes to succeed to the Gupta throne.

Another important point which has attracted the attention of the historians is the re-marriage of Dhruva Devi

with Chandra Gupta II. Some writers feel that a marriage with the widow of an elder brother was not in accordance with the Hindu laws then prevalant and was, therefore, not possible. Dr. Altekar has, however, pleaded in favour of it and has written that the idea may appear strange to us but this was not the case during the period of our forefathers. It was a normal practice during that period and it would not have caused a flutter anywhere.

Mahadevi Dhruva Devi has nowhere been shown as a wife of Rama Gupta on contemporary record. She, however, does appear in the inscriptions as the chief queen of Chandra Gupta II. Dhruva Devi of the drama of Vishakha Dutta could be some other lady.

The event of the marriage of Chandra Gupta II with Dhruva Devi seems to be a later addition to Harsha Charitra and should not be taken very seriously.

Another point to be borne in mind is that Rama Gupta is nowhere mentioned in the epigraphic or numismatic records, except for a few copper coins which have been found in Western India. Dr. Altekar tries to rule out this objection as well, saying that perhaps the coins could not be issued because of a very short period of his reign. However, even if some were issued, perhaps those might have been in the Bayana Hoard, but were melted down along with so many other coins of that hoard.

In short it can be said that in all probability, Rama Gupta, believed to be the elder brother of Chandra Gupta II, was a local chief of Malwa, having the right of issuing copper coins in his name, and was holding a semi-independent position under Chandra Gupta II. He was attacked and defeated by a Saka chief, who exploited the helplessness of Rama Gupta and subjected him to a humiliating peace. Rama Gupta approached Chandra Gupta for help who in turn rose to the occasion and brought an end to the Saka chief. Thus, the views and theories put forward by various authors cannot be said to have solved the controversy about Rama Gupta. Further exploration and discovery of historical material may perhaps enable us to come to some definite conclusion.

CHANDRA GUPTA II VIKRAMADITYA

Chandra Gupta II combined in himself the warlike qualities of his father and the administrative ability of Chandra Gupta Maurya. He ascended the throne sometime in 375 A.D. and ruled up to 414 A.D. According to some writers he ascended the Gupta throne after the murder of his elder brother, Rama Gupta. The inscription of his period discovered at Mathura, however, tells a different story. He is stated to have been selected by his father, of several sons, as the most suitable for kingship. He fully justified the confidence reposed in him.

The people of India enjoyed a long spell of peace and prosperity durimg his reign. He faithfully followed the golden principle that "it behoves the kings to be always active." He was universally acclaimed for the untiring devotion to the well-being of his people. His sense of justice and administrative acumen became a legend for posterity.

He was as brave as a lion, as generous and hospitable as Hatim, as resolute and determined as a rock and as broad-minded in his religious outlook as Akbar. He was an administrator like Sher Shah Suri. Even those people who did not see eye to eye with him in their religious ideologies praised him for the respect and charity he showed to them and to their religious institutions. He was perhaps the most popular ruler of ancient Indian history.

Many legends and popular stories have been attached to his name. Some writers are of the opinion that he was the popular 'Vikramaditya of Ujjain' whose court was known for its nine gems one of whom was Kalidasa. The theory finds support in the fact that there was no other king of his calibre and standing in the preceding and succeeding centuries. He was the first king among the Guptas who took up the proud title of Vikramaditya. The conquest of Malwa, being a very valuable and important victory, as it had defied the Indian monarchs during the preceding four centuries, might have tempted him to prolong his stay in this Western region in order to give it peace and restore

its lost prosperity and order which had been disturbed during the continuous struggle. With this stay of the great Gupta ruler with his court in Malwa, Ujjain might have gained its importance. All this might have led to his becoming famous as 'Vikramaditya of Ujjain'. Chandra Gupt II possessed an exceptional sense of justice and administrative ability to make the people of Malwa forget the 'Saka rulers' and to convert them into staunch supporters of his dynasty. This view has, however, been disputed by some eminent historians who have tried to prove that 'Vikramaditya of Ujjain' was unmistakably a different king from Chandra Gupta II and flourished about four centuries earlier to him. He also belonged to a different dynasty, started his own era and was a great 'Vaishnavite'.

Some other writers have tried to identify him with Chandra of Mehrauli Inscription, who has been accredited with a grand victory over the confederacy of his enemies and conquest of the territories of Vangas and Vahlikas. His empire extended as far as the mouths of the seven rivers in the North, the Western seas and the Bengal in the East. This theory carries some weight as Chandra Gupta II did rule over these territories and had won for himself an undisputed supreme position in Northern India. This inscription also tells us that he was a Vaishnavite and it was in honour of the latter that the iron pillar was installed at Vishnupada from where it was later removed to Delhi. This coincides with the fact that Chandra Gupta II was also a devotee of Visnhu. If Chandra Gupta was in fact 'Chandra' of Mehrauli Inscription, then his empire extended as far as the country of Vahlikas i.e. (frontier province) in the North, Southern seas in the South, the mouth of the Indus in the West and to Bengal in the East. This theory gains support from the fact that the language used in this inscription is somewhat similar to the language of the Allahabad Pillar Inscription.

Some writers, however, find one weak point in this theory. No coin or other inscriptions of Chandra Gupta II have so far been discovered either in the extreme North or in the South. They hold that Chandra Gupta II presumably

ruled over the greater part of Northern India and he added Gujarat and Kathiawar to the Gupta empire, which he won more by strategy and diplomacy than by means of war. In history, however, he does not occupy as important a position as he ought to be given in accordance with the legends. Even among the Guptas, his predecessor, Samudra Gupta, gets a better deal at the hands of the historians. A critical study of his activities in the different fields, especially in administrative reforms and works of public utility, however, reveals that although he was not a great military genius like his father (He did not have to his credit a long record of hundreds of battles) yet his administrative work, of which Fahien gives an impartial testimony, was, not so insignificant as to give him a second rate position when compared with his father. He was to Samudra Gupta what Akbar was to Babur, what Ranjit Singh was to Guru Gobind Singh, what Stalin was to Lenin and what Nehru is to Mahatma Gandhi. He had to his credit the accomplishment of the grand structure of the Gupta empire, the foundations of which had been laid down by his father, Samudra Gupta. Unfortunately, historians have laid more stress on the architect of this structure than on its builder.

His early history is shrouded in mystery and the exact dates of his birth and accession to the Imperial Gupta throne are not known. Scholars differ in regard to the circumstances under which he ascended the throne. A group of historians is of the opinion that he had a disputed succession. His claim to the throne was disputed by his elder brother, Rama Gupta, who, according to Dr. Jayaswal, was the immediate successor of Samudra Gupta.

The claims of Chandra Gupta II were set aside in spite of the fact that he was the fittest of all the sons of Samudra Gupta to take up the responsibility of the state. Luck, however, favoured him and he extricated his elder brother from out of the misfortune which befall the latter when he went in person to suppress the revolt of the Saka chief. The story has been told above in detail. The upshot of the whole episode was that in the end Chandra Gupta II ascend-

ed the throne. He married Dhruva Devi, his widow sister-in-law and nobody raised any objection against this marriage, which was contrary to all the canons of Hindu religion. It was presumably because the ground for it had already been prepared, partly by the bravery of Chandra Gupta II and partly by the humiliating defeat and cowardice of his elder brother.

Dr. V.A. Smith writes "He was a strong and vigorous ruler, well qualified to govern and augment an extensive empire. He loved high sounding titles which proclaimed his martial prowess, and was fond of depicting himself on his coins as engaged in successful personal combat with a lion, after the old Persian fashion". He assumed the proud title of 'Vikramaditya'. This title was taken, firstly, to divert the attention of people from the murder of his elder brother and his marriage with his sister-in-law. It was shocking to the people that Dhruva Devi had agreed to marry the murderer of her husband. This created an impression, rather a misgiving and apprehension in the minds of people that perhaps she also had a hand in the murder. For all his shortcomings, Rama Gupta, in the eyes of his subjects, had not committed so grave an offence as to meet such a tragic end.

A detailed sketch of the life and achievements of Chandra Gupta II can be drawn from three sources of information of his period. These are coins, inscriptions and the account of Fahien, the Chinese pilgrim, who visited India during his reign.

The coins of Chandra Gupta II can be classified under the following heads :

(1) Archer type.
(2) Lion-slayer type.
(3) Horseman type.
(4) Chhatra type.
(5) Couch type.
(6) Standard type.
(7) Chakra Vikrama type.

The study of these coins reveals his warlike qualities, his love for sports and games and his appreciation of the different arts. It throws light on the economic prosperity of the country. Fahien writes that barter sytem was in vogue in the different parts of India and people also used cowries as a medium of exchange. The good coins seems to have been used very sparingly. On the reverse of almost all these coins the figure of goddess Lakshmi is shown. This confirms our conviction about the king's religious belief in Vishnu and his consort Lakshmi.

From the Archer type of coins, which seems to be very popular type of his coins, it appears that the use of bows and arrows was still very common with the Indian soldiery and this weapon of war was preferred over the other weapons. Lion-slayer type, which has three varieties, i.e., Lion-combatant type, Lion-trampler type, Lion-retreating type, provides evidence of the king's love for games and hunting and also indirectly hints at his resolute and determined nature. This also hints at the conquest of the territories of the Saka satraps which were known for the hide-outs of the lions. The king presumably wanted to signify his victory over the Sakas through the issue of these coins. The Saka rulers met him like lions, but were trampled and compelled to beat a retreat. The 'lion-slayer' may also be described as 'Sakari', the term by which he was known even three centuries after his death.

The horseman type of coins tells about the king's love for horse-riding and sports. He was the first among the Gupta rulers to issue this type of coins. Unlike his father, who showed more keenness in musical instruments during the leisure hours, he preferred to take such military exercises as were a better pastime for a ruler who had to pass the greater part of his life in saddle. Chhatra and Couch type of coins depict the majestic qualities of Chandra Gupta II. He has been shown in both these coins in all his pomp and splendour, with his attendants bearing umbrella as insignia of royalty in Chhatra type and a big couch instead of a throne for the leisure hours in the other. Chakra-Vikrama type was his innovation and seems to depict his devotion to Vishnu

and the supreme undisputed position which he gained after his victories in the North and North-West.

The inscriptions indicate that in spite of the fact that the king was a Vaishnavite, he was tolerant towards the other religions and set apart big sums of money as donations for their activities. Chandra Gupta II was not interested in the recording of the inscriptions as none of those discovered so far seems to have been erected under his direct instructions or supervision. Whatever inscriptions have been discovered were got engraved by his officers in the different parts of his empire. On the one hand, these help us to know about the extension of his empire and, on the other, tell us something about his predecessors.

The inscriptions so far discovered are :

(1) Udayagiri Cave Inscription of Chandra Gupta II.

(2) Mathura Stone Inscription of Chandra Gupta II.

(3) Sanchi Stone Inscription of Chandra Gupta II.

(4) Gadhwa Stone Inscription of Chandra Gupta II.

The account of Fahien, the Chinese pilgrim, comes next in importance. However, as Dr. R.K. Mookerji has pointed out, he is not the only instance of cultural intercourse between India and China. For a long time India had been looked up to by China as the seat of knowledge and highest wisdom which were eagerly and devoutly sought after by the best Chinese minds. Fahien came to India, primarily, to collect material on Budhism and to visit its holy places. He did not seem to be interested in the Indian affairs as such. His reference to Indian affairs is, therefore, always in a casual way. He did not bother himself to write even the name of the great king in whose kingdom he stayed for such a long time. However, being a disinterested person, his remarks had their own value. A few of them are as follows :

About the people of the middle kingdom which was situated to the South of Muttra (Mathura), he states that they were prosperous and happy. Official restrictions were non-existent... Corporal punishment was not given to anybody. Fines corresponding to the gravity of the offences

were imposed... People believed in and practised Ahimsa. They did not drink wine, nor did they take onions or garlic. Chandalas were segregated. Fahien's observations about Asoka's palace at Pataliputra are very interesting. Its various halls, all built of piled up stones, its walls and gates, and designs which were carved, engraved and in-laid, were so magnificent that it did not appear to be the result of human labour. Fahien attributed this work to the spirits. There were free hospitals established by elders and gentry which were open to all poor or helpless, orphans, widowers and cripples. In these hospitals there was provision for medicines, good doctors and food.

From these remarks we can conclude that India was passing through a very glorious period and perhaps the peace, prosperity and civilization of those days were unique in the world. Fahien himself admits that India was far more advanced than China in respect of freedom of movement allowed to the foreigners and freedom of expression, writing and speech permitted to the people. The Indians were of a very high moral character and many of the business transactions were carried on orally. People were very hospitable. Fahien says that wherever he went he was received very cordially. These characteristics and qualities of the people go to prove that Vikramaditya bestowed on his subjects the benefits of an orderly government which enabled them to lead a peaceful and prosperous life. The country was well governed and there was as little administrative interference in the daily life of the people as possible. Dr. Smith says that, "probably India has never been governed better after the oriental manner, than it was during the reign of Vikramaditya. The government did not attempt to do too much; but let the people alone, and was accordingly popular".

PERIOD OF RULE

For his period of rule we have to depend mainly on his inscriptions which were engraved in the different parts of his empire by his governors. The Mathura Pillar Inscription

which was engraved in the sixty-first year of the Gupta era, indicates that the pillar was erected in the fifth year of the reign of Chandra Gupta II. From Sanchi Stone Inscription we gather that he continued to rule upto 413 A.D.

In the 95th year of the Gupta era, i.e. 415 A.D. the Bhilsad Inscription was engraved. It belongs to the period of Kumara Gupta I. It can thus be said that Chandra Gupta II died in between 413-415 A.D. or he ruled from 375 to 414 A.D., i.e. for a period of about 39 years.

Conquests of Chandra Gupta II

Samudra Gupta, no doubt, defeated all the rulers of India and won for himself the supreme position of a samrat, but he could not thoroughly subdue all the territories he conquered. His empire was, in fact, a loosely-knit confederacy and his death was a signal for the disruption and disintegration of the empire which had been consolidated after a hard labour of three decades. Immediately after his accession, Chandra Gupta II had to deal with many such chieftains, as, taking advantage of the weakness of his predecessors, had asserted their independence.

The coup against his brother no doubt brought him into prominence but it gave a chance to disruptive elements to try for independence. It was indeed difficult for Chandra Gupta II to control the situation created by him, and to wash the blot of the murder of his elder brother and his ultimate marriage with Dhruva Devi. According to some writers adoption of high-sounding title of Vikramaditya by him was meant to suppress the opposition and to divert the attention of his subjects.

Immediately after his accession he started on his triumphant military career. He was determined to complete the work initiated by his predecessor. In his subjugation of the Northern India he did not merely depend upon his armed forces but also had recourse to diplomacy, whereever considered politic. Some of the marriage alliances, which he contracted, were aimed at putting an end to

opposition which, in the absence of these alliances, would have crushed him. These policies made him famous as a great statesman and diplomat. From the available records of his reign it appears that first of all he turned his attention towards the North-Western states. The Mathura Pillar Inscription of 380 A.D.stands as a testimony to that. Some writers feel that these regions had remained unsubdued during the period of Samudra Gupta. By their diplomatic alliances the Kushan kings had created such a situation that Samudra Gupta could not completely annihilate them. Arguing on the basis of the titles, like Maharaja and Rajadhiraja assumed by Chandra Gupta II on the lines of Kushan kings, Dr. Bhandarkar has tried to prove that Chandra Gupta II was perhaps the first of the Gupta rulers who wrested these regions from the Kushans. This, however, does not seem to be correct as the Eran Pillar Inscription of Samudra Gupta clearly speaks of the extension of his empire to these regions. It is no doubt true that Samudra Gupta could not personally march against the Kushan kings and thus completely extinguish their authority in India, but commanding someone's obedience is nothing short of actual subjugation. The question of Chandra Gupta II's wresting these regions from the Kushans, therefore, does not arise.

The Mehrauli Iron Pillar Inscription, wherein a king by the name of Chandra has been described to be engaged in battle with the confederacy of the rulers of the regions of Bhagirath and Padma, has been identified with Chandra Gupta II. Some writers, on the basis of this inscription, have tried to prove that the North-Western rulers refused to acknowledge the supremacy of Chandra Gupta II, although they had concluded subordinate alliances with Samudra Gupta. This evidence is confirmed from the fact that Rama Gupta, the predecessor of Chandra Gupta II, was obliged to march against a ruler in the North-West at the latter's refusal to acknowledge his supremacy. Thus, we can say that the North-Western regions were inhabited by insubordinate elements of freedom-loving chieftains and Chandra Gupta had to deal with these rulers with a strong hand. This he

could not help, as otherwise security of India would have always remained a pawn in the hands of foreign aggressors. During the first five to ten years of his reign, Chandra Gupta II devoted himself whole-heartedly to the strengthening of his North-Western dominions from Jullundur to Mathura.

Some writers believe that Chandra Gupta's empire extended as far as Balkh, beyond the Hindu Kush mountains. This view, however, is not confirmed by any local or historical record.

Chandra Gupta II next turned his attention towards the Saka rulers. The tradition about Vikramaditya who was 'Sakari' or the killer of the Sakas and who drove them and other foreigners out of the Indian soil and patronised learning is most appropriately applicable to Chandra Gupta II of all other kings who flourished before him and after him, and were known by this title. Dr. Altekar has put forward a similar view, although in a modified way. He is of the opinion that the empire of Samudra Gupta was shaken by some internal insurrection immediately after his death and at the accession of his weak son, Rama Gupta. The tribes who had all along been loyal allies started creating trouble on the Northern borders and Rama Gupta was obliged to march against them. He was, however, defeated by the Saka tribes and compelled to purchase peace by offering to surrender his wife. The situation was saved by Chandra Gupta II, the younger brother of Rama Gupta, who saved both the queen and the empire by a daring deed and took the reins of government in his own hands. He became the emperor and married Dhruva Devi. Bana has written in Harsha Charitra, that the Saka ruler was murdered when he was courting the wife of another. Sankararya, the commentator of Harsha Charitra, makes a clearer reference that Sakapati was killed in private by Chandra Gupta II disguised as a woman.

This episode demoralised the rebellious Saka chieftains. Chandra Gupta II was also determined to reduce their states

completely. His policy towards these rulers was similar to that of his father's policy in the Northern regions of India. Fortunately, for Chandra Gupta II, the Sakas had been greatly reduced in their territories and strength by their defeat at the hands of the Vakatakas. Chandra Gupta II was shrewd enough to conclude a matrimonial alliance with the Vakatakas and thus enlist their support against the Sakas of Malwa and Saurashtra. According to some historians the Vakatakas were placed in an important strategical position and could control any Northern invader of the dominions of the Sakas Satraps of Guajrat and Saurashtra. Chandra Gupta alligned them to his side by marrying off his daughter to the Vakataka prince.

However, Rudrasena II, his son-in-law, died after a very short reign and the power fell into the hands of his daughter, Prabhavati Gupta. Chandra Gupta II fully exploited this advantageous position and with the help of the Vakataka forces personally marched for the complete annexation of the Western territories. Chandra Gupta II himself had no direct provocation or legitimate grievance to march against the Saka rulers except perhaps an imperialistic ambition against a rich neighbour. However, it may be that the casus belli was found in the differences of race, creed and manners. The fact remains that Chandra Gupta dealt with an iron rod in his policy towards these rulers who were a menace to the security of his government. He used these marriage alliances for the fulfilment of his ambitions. Dr. Ray Chaudhary has called these alliances as "the trump cards" of the Guptas. These enabled them to get Magadha and the throne of the Andhra. They cemented their friendship with the Nagas by this means and controlled the mighty kingdom of the Vakatakas.

Estimate of Chandra Gupta II Vikramaditya

Chandra Gupta II has been praised by all the historians. His period was perhaps the best in the Gupta age. It is popularly termed as the golden period of Indian history. Dr. V.A. Smith writes that India did not have a better orient-

al monarch than him, before or after him. He gave to India a government which was an example in itself.

He was not only a national hero of his times but is perhaps the national hero of the whole span of the Indian history. Fahien's account is full of praise for his regime. He says that even in China people did not enjoy as much freedom of expression, speech and movement as was then enjoyed by the people of India.

Unlike his predecessors or successors, Chandra Gupta II spared sufficient time to devote to the constructive work and the introduction of reforms in the various departments of state. He was far-sighted enough to realise that the mere conquest of a country did not make its conqueror an accepted ruler. The true conquest lay in the winning over of the hearts of the people which could be possible only by the establishment of a benevolent government. Chandra Gupta II seems to have visited the different parts of his empire personally to see for himself the day-to-day life of the people. Presumably he personally attended to their genuine grievances. From the contemporary Indian records we gather that he divided the hours of his day for performing the multifarious duties. In his works Kalidasa has featured the king as a hero. The conditions of the people depicted in his novels are not of the past but of the times he was living in. Chandra Gupta was fully qualified to be a hero of the imagination of Kalidasa; rather, he inspired whatever Kalidasa wrote.

Chandra Gupta II was a great soldier and a man of a very strong will power. Even the greatest calamity or problem could not ruffle him. He met all sorts of tough problems boldly and showed his far-sightedness in tackling them. His struggle with the Sakas and other Western rulers has made some of the historians call him a diplomat more than a soldier. To ignore his military qualities is a grave injustice to his attainments as a soldier. He was an able strategic administrator. He understood the weak points of his enemies and struck at the right time. His plan to meet the Saka chief in the guise of a queen and kill him in

his camp and undo all the plans of the latter speaks volumes for his capability as a soldier and a diplomat. From his coins also we know about his qualities as a soldier. Unlike his father, he preferred Horse-type coins to the Lyrist-type as he felt that it behoves a soldier to be in the saddle than play on a musical instrument. An interesting feature of his coins is that instead of comparing himself with a lion he preferred to be known as a lion-killer or a lion-trampler. In his coins the lion is either being trampled upon or retreating. This indicates that he was braver than a lion.

Chandra Gupta II was also a past-master in diplomacy. His matrimonial alliances secured for him a supreme position in India. He accomplished this grand task without any bloodshed. His own marriage in the Naga family converted Nagas into his allies. These rulers had been a constant eye-sore to his father, Samudra Gupta. The latter had been compelled to wage many bloody wars against them and exterminate some of the states, like the Vakatakas. These people enjoyed a supreme position in the politics of India. Chandra Gupta II took a very wise step in befriending them and converting them into his supporters by the marriage of his daughter Prabhavati with the Vakataka ruler. A few years after this marriage the Vakataka ruler died. It is important to note that Prabhavati, the daughter of Chandra Gupta II, preferred to be known as a daughter of the Guptas than a queen of the Vakatakas. Very proudly she got her relation with the Guptas mentioned in the Vakataka records. The support of the Vakatakas proved to be of considerable importance in the subjugation of countries like Saurashtra, Kathiawar and other Western regions and, Chandra Gupta II, after a brief struggle, could claim for himself an undisputed position in the whole of Northern India.

Chandra Gupta II never forgot to take keen interest in the affairs of his government as well as his subjects. He very strictly followed the instructions laid down in Dharma Shastras for a king. Like Asoka the Great he was easily accessible to the public all the 24 hours of the day. He

made it a point to have the best men as his advisers. His court at Ujjain is known for its nine gems up to this day. They were persons proficient in the different fields of administration and art. Their best advice was always available to the king. Never before was an Indian king as fortunate as Chandra Gupta to have such a type of 'men of letters' and administrative geniuses. Kalidasa in his different dramas, draws the picture of the day-to-day life of the people under Chandra Gupta Vikramaditya. His rule was in fact another Rama Rajya and the people enjoyed peace and prosperity.

He was also a man of arts. Being himself very cultured and educated, he patronised men of letters. He was very fond of the company of learned persons. They flocked to his court from the different parts of India. While the great poets and writers, through their work, brought awakening among the masses and a revolution in the literary history of India, the master-painters and master-sculptors, through their paintings and engravings, gave a new life to the imagination of the poets and the writers. The Ajanta caves, and the schools of art at Mathura, Nalanda and Benaras have left behind an ever-lasting impression of the glorious period of Chandra Gupta Vikramaditya. India not only experienced the climax in the different fields of art but there was also a religious renaissance. Unlike the Reformation in Europe which brought in its wake great bloodshed, persecutions, and untold miseries to lakhs of innocent people, in India harmony prevailed everywhere. The people and the religious leaders took these reforms in a spirit of co-operation.

The ruins of the Hindu temples and Buddhist monasteries provide living proofs of the splendour of that period and the great faith people had in their religion at that time. Chandra Gupta II himself followed a very tolerant and liberal policy. It was in fact due to him that all religions flourished together and never came into conflict with one another. Fahien too tells of some disputes only amongst people of different faiths. These disputes, however, were of a minor nature and the people tried to settle them through discus-

sion, worthy of the cultured people. Mr. R.N. Dandekar has found the effect of this catholicity of their faith in the fact that while Udayagiri Cave and Mathura Stone Inscriptions are Saivite in character, the Sanchi Inscription is Buddhist and the other Udayagiri Cave Inscription is Vaishnavite.

Chandra Gupta II also patronized learning. The description of Nalanda University, as given by Fahien, gives sufficient proof of the great proficiency which the Indians had attained in the different fields of education. There were about 1,500 professors and 15,000 students. It is important to note that, unlike the present times, Indians did not go abroad to get higher education. Fahien writes that Nalanda was a city of learning to which people of the different nationalities flocked every year. A very hard competition was there at the time of admission and only deserving cases could get a chance. People considered it a privilege to study at this University. Great men like Kalidasa, Kumara Bhatt, Dandin, etc. flourished during the days of Chandra Gupta. The king's patronage of these learned people, as well as yearly grants to the University of Nalanda, are evidence of his interest in the field of education.

Like his father, Chandra Gupta II also did not forget to maintain his relations with the foreign countries. These relations were developed due to three reasons. By the conquest of Western countries the empire of Chandra Gupta II touched the Western seas and this brought him into direct contact with the Western countries. From the days of Alexander, India was known for its commercial ties with the Western markets. Peace and prosperity together with unity and nationality gave Indians an opportunity to invest money into the different trades. Trade thus flourished making the country richer day by day.

The cultural and religious advancement of India had its impact on neighbouring countries as well. Many Buddhist scholars visited China, Japan and other South-Eastern countries during the period of Chandra Gupta II. Some Indian princes and Brahmin priests also visited the

East-Indies and other neighbouring countries like Ceylon, Burma and Siam and made the people of those countries acquainted with the Indian culture, till then the preserve of Indians alone. The temples in the East-Indies stand a living proof of the contacts India had with these countries during the days of the Guptas.

Chandra Gupta II was thus a great king. He was a great warrior, a great statesman, a great scholar, a great religious leader and a great administrator. He deserved all the credit, which has been given to him by the different religions for his qualities as a king.

KUMARA GUPTA I

Chandra Gupta II died sometime in 414-415 A.D. after a long and glorious reign of about 40 years. He was succeeded by Kumara Gupta I, born of queen Dhruva Devi or Dhruva Svamini. Like his father, Kumara Gupta I also gave to India another 40 years of peace and security. He has left behind a large number of inscriptions and coins whose evidence supports this statement. Unlike his predecessor, the long reign of Kumara Gupta, except the last few years, was uneventful. He, therefore, does not attract as much attention of the historians as other kings of his dynasty. Some of the writers go to the extent of saying that the period of Kumara Gupta I was nothing but a long record of achievements of Skanda Gupta—his immediate successor. These scholars, unfortunately, do not give any credit to Kumara Gupta I for the maintenance of law and order for a long period of 40 years in the confines of that extensive empire which he had inherited from his father, Chandra Gupta II. Dr. R.C. Majumdar has dramatically described his reign as a dark background to the brilliant reigns of his two predecessors and immediate successor. However, according to him, this may be unfair to Kumara Gupta and not the actual historical truth.

On the basis of his coins and inscriptions, whose find-spots are scattered all over Northern India, we can call his period as a period of the 'fruition of the empire'. The

seeds had been sown by Samudra Gupta and Chandra Gupta II and the days of Kumara Gupta I were the days of harvest. Peace and plenty prevailed everywhere. The government, being free from internal as well as external dangers, concentrated its attention on several administrative reforms. Although Kumara Gupta I does not have to his credit victories against heavy odds like his grandfather or father, yet his achievements in the administrative field are no less renowned.

The impression gathered from his inscriptions and coins is that he had the knack of selecting the best men for the jobs. Unlike his predecessors, he believed that in administration, merit and not kinship, should be the main criterion for selection of men to high posts. Never before him in the Imperial Gupta period were the commoners given a chance of holding viceregal posts. From his inscriptions we gather that this highest category of posts, which was reserved only for the royal princes, was thrown open to the commoners. His choice of Skanda Gupta in preference to Puru Gupta, his son by the chief queen, as commander of the army which was sent to deal with the Pushyamitras or Huns, speaks for the high principles of state-craft which he introduced and followed strictly. In his eyes 'kingship knew no kinship'. He also desired that he should be succeeded by the fittest prince. Therefore, he did not name his successor, but left the choice to experience and able generalship. This led to a war of succession among his four sons immediately after his death, and Skanda Gupta, the fittest of the princes, ascended the throne. Would that Shahjahan, the Mughal emperor, had followed this principle and saved himself from the wretched life and the ignominious end which he met by showing preference for one prince over others.

Of the total number of 13 inscriptions of his period so far discovered, unfortunately there is none of any great political significance. The following are some of the epigraphic records which help us to reconstruct the history of his reign which has so far been ignored by the historians as an uneventful period.

(1) *Bhilsad Stone Pillar Inscription:* It is partly in prose and partly in verse. It was discovered by General Cunningham and is in Sanskrit. It is dated 415-16 A.D. It is the first known date of Kumara Gupta. On its basis we arrive at the conclusion that Kumara Gupta ascended the throne sometime in 415 A.D. It has no political significance and was presumably inscribed to record the accomplishments of Dhruva Sarman.

(2) *Gadhwa Stone Inscription :* It is dated 417-18 A.D. and is in Sanskrit. It gives us details of two gifts of ten dinar each to the Brahmin community of the place and has no political or historical importance.

(3) Besides the above we come across four other inscriptions, two at Damodarpur, one at Dhanardaha and the fourth at Baigram. These inscriptions were inscribed during the 28th year, 32nd year, 17th year, 32nd year respectively of Kumara Gupta's reign. These have no historical importance but great significance has been attached to their discovery because we do not have any other evidence to establish the extent of the sway of Guptas to Bengal. These are very helpful to know the extent of the Guptas' rule in the North and North-East. These inscriptions contain only details of land transaction, unlike the records of struggles in the inscriptions of other Gupta monarchs. Another important discovery from these inscriptions is the appointment of Cirataduita to the high office of a viceroy which is a departure from the practice in vogue during the earlier Imperial Gupta period.

(4) We come across several inscriptions of Kumara Gupta I in the Western India especially in Malwa, and also at Eran and Mandasor. From the Malwa Inscriptions, we gather that Ghatotkacha, a son of Kumara Gupta, had been appointed as the governor of Eastern Malwa. The situation in Western Malwa, however, seems to be different. The inscription of Kumara Gupta at Mandasor, unlike the other inscriptions of his period, bears the date Malva year 493 (A.D. 435). The absence of the Gupta era has led the histo-

rians to opine that Bandhuvarman, the ruler of Dasapura, enjoyed internal autonomy and acknowledged Kumara Gupta only as a nominal head of his state. From another record at Mandasor, which also bears a Malwa year, some historians have concluded that Govinda Gupta, a brother of Kumara Gupta I, revolted against his authority and established an independent rule in Western Malwa. The line which has led to the above view is as below :—

"Indra is represented as being suspicious of Govinda Gupta's power: the latter seems to have been the supreme ruler".

From the Vaisali seal we gather that Chandra Gupta II had another son by the name of Govinda Gupta from the queen Dhruva Svamini.

On the basis of these two records, Dr. Bhandarkar has presumed that Indra was none else but Kumara Gupta I who became jealous of the ascendancy of his brother, Govinda Gupta, who, after a successful revolt, had established an independent government in Malwa. The above presumption is strengthened by a later inscription discovered at Mandasor wherein we do not find the name of the ruling Gupta monarch. The view is confirmed by the fact that even the Gupta era is discarded in the later inscriptions.

Thus, from the inscriptions we come to know of the extent of the Gupta empire over Bengal and Eastern Malwa. We also get an indication about a possible separation of Western Malwa from the vast Gupta empire during the later years of Kumara Gupta, which may perhaps be confirmed by the discovery of further records.

The coins of Kumara Gupta I are also helpful to us to reconstruct the history of his period. He issued the following thirteen types of coins :

1. Archer type
2. Horseman type
3. Swordsman type
4. Lion-slayer type.
5. Tiger-slayer type.
6. Elephant-rider type.

7. Elephant-rider-lion-slayer type.
8. Rhinoceros-slayer type.
9. Ashvamedha type.
10. Kartikeya type.
11. Chhatra type.
12. Apratigha type.
13. Lyrist type.

These coins have been found at Satara, Ahmedabad, Bhavnagar and in the hoards of Bayana. These are very helpful to know the extent of his empire in the West and the South-West. In fact these were some of the important types of his coins. He seems to have issued many more varieties of silver and copper coins. We can, therefore, say that the king had sufficient time and took keen interest in the reform of currency. From the pure metals, especially gold and silver, used in these coins, we can say that the country was passing through a very prosperous period. The ruler had no problems except his anxiety to give to his people the best government. The quality and the standard of his coins made Mr. R.D. Banerjee write that the coins of Kumara Gupta were a class by themselves. These coins not only acquaint us with the qualities of the emperor in the fields of war and sports but also give us an insight into the personality of this great ruler. India had, in fact, reached the high watermark of material progress.

From the Ashvamedha type of coins we can clear our doubts about the possible break-up of the empire or its experiencing a possible eclipse at some stage during the period of his government. However, the epigraphic record, wherein we come across some references of a possible disturbance during the later years of his reign, makes us opine that the Ashvamedha coins were issued sometime during the middle of his reign when peace and plenty was everywhere and the enemies had been completely subdued.

The Ashvamedha coins point to the fact that perhaps Kumara Gupta I made some new conquests which led him to celebrate that sacrifice. However, the records so far discovered are silent in this respect. The Kartikeya type of coins gives further proof of the emperor's love for war as Kartikeya is the god of war. But we cannot conclude that he

had some fresh conquests to his credit, in the absence of some definite proof.

From what is stated above we can say that Kumara Gupta I was a worthy successor of Chandra Gupta II and by his administrative system which was to the full satisfaction of his people, he added another glorious chapter to the golden period of the Imperial Guptas.

The last years of Kumara Gupta I, unlike his earlier years, were far from peaceful. The Bhitari Stone Pillar Inscription of Skanda Gupta tells us that the Imperial Guptas were confronted with enemies of unending resources. These were Pushyamitras from within India and the Huns from outside. It is not known as yet whether the Pushyamitras were provoked to rise by the militarism of Kumara Gupta I or they rose of their own accord with the least provocation from the Guptas. It may be presumed that the revolt of Govinda Gupta in Western India and his assumption of independent powers might have encouraged the Pushyamitras to strike at the Gupta power when it was already very much weakened by the internal dissensions. This presumption carries conviction as, according to the Puranas, the Pushyamitras were inhabiting the Narmada valley which was quite adjacent to the troubled regions of Western India. It may also be presumed that the Huns' attack on the Imperial Gupta empire during the later years of Kumara Gupta gave chance to the Pushyamitras to fish in the troubled waters.

Kumara Gupta I could not successfully tackle the situation which was steadily deteriorating and assigned the onerous task of protecting the borders to Skanda Gupta who had gained proficiency both in diplomacy and warfare. Skanda Gupta had to fight on two fronts—the Huns and the Pushyamitras. He repulsed the former and suppressed the latter and thus won the admiration of the people. In Line 10 of the Bhitari Stone Pillar Inscription we are told that Skanda Gupta had to spend a whole night on the bare earth during these struggles.

A mention of a possible invasion of the Gupta empire by the Pushyamitras is also made in stanzas 2 and 3 of the

Junagadh Inscription of Skanda Gupta wherein the following description is given :

"And next, victorious forever is the supreme King of Kings over Kings, whose breast is embraced by the goddess of wealth and splendour; who has developed heroism by (the strength of his) arms; and who plucked (and utilized) the authority of (his local) representatives, who were so many Garudas, (and used it as) an antidote against the (hostile) kings, who were so many serpents, lifting up their hoods in pride and arrogance.

"Skanda Gupta, of great glory, the abode of kingly qualities, who, when (his) father by his own power had attained the position of being a friend of the gods (i.e., had died), bowed down his enemies, and made subject to himself the whole earth, bounded by the waters of the four oceans, (and) full of thriving countries round the borders of it".

While describing the victory of Skanda Gupta both over the external and internal enemies, we altogether lose sight of Kumara Gupta I. This victory was won by the Imperial Gupta army which was organised by Kumara Gupta I. But for its grand discipline and organisation the Imperial Guptas would have never been in a position to ward off their enemies. Kumara Gupta I, the man behind the show, is thus to be praised for this grand organisation, although he could not personally (presumably due to his old age) lead his army to victory. It is unfortunte that historians have not paid any tribute to the qualities of Kumara Gupta I in the fields of war and administration, which he so richly deserves. It would, therefore, be injustice to look upon his period as a dark background to the brilliant days of his successor. His last known date is 455 A.D. He presumably passed away when his army was still in battle-array against his enemies.

Estimate of Kumara Gupta I

Kumara Gupta has not been given his due share of importance by the historians; rather his achievements have been underestimated, because his reign happens to fall between

two reigns considered to be the foremost rulers in Indian history. Kumara Gupta I combined in himself the qualities of a warrior, an administrator and a tolerant king. Although he was not as great a warrior as Samudra Gupta or an administrator as Chandra Gupta Vikramaditya, his victories against the Huns and the Pushyamitras are a sufficient proof of his qualities as a military administrator. From his coins also we gather that he was very fond of military exploits and his adoption of the title of "Vyaghra-bala-parakrama" throws an indirect hint at his possible conquest of the Narbada territories. The Ashvamedha coins also confirm our conviction, although, unfortuntely, we are so far unable to lay our hands upon some positive proof to support our views.

That he was a great administrator is an undisputed fact. To rule peacefully for over three decades over a vast kingdom, when the communication system had not yet fully developed, and to bring advancement in all walks of life, when the people did not have a developed outlook so far, is a sufficient proof—if a proof is required—of his qualities as an administrator.

In spite of the fact that he was a worshipper of Vishnu, he tolerated followers of the other faiths. Inscriptions, located in the different parts of his empire, bear testimony to his spirit of tolerance. During his days there was mutual understanding, co-operation and respect for each other's religion. This was perhaps more pronounced than during the days of Chandra Gupta Vikramaditya.

Further excavations may perhaps raise his prestige still higher in our eyes and make us revise our opinion about him justifying the saying—

"Peace hath her victories,
No less renowned than war".

SKANDA GUPTA

During the last years of Kumara Gupta I India was passing through very troubled times. Internal disharmony prevailed everywhere and the country was exposed to the

recurrent foreign invasions. Pushyamitras had revolted in Central India and asserted their independence. Huns too were weakening the Gupta regime by their incessant attacks. The Imperial Gupta forces, under Skanda Gupta, kept a constant vigil to meet the challenge of the Huns, who frequently raided Indian border-posts. They had been successful in establishing their sway in some of the border provinces (such as Afghanistan and Punjab) of the Imperial Guptas.

The critical situation, with which the people of these provinces were confronted has been confirmed by the discovery of the two hoards of gold coins at Bamnala and Bayana. Dr. Altekar believes that these hoards belong to the later years of Kumara Gupta I or the early years of Skanda Gupta's reign when there was a likelihood of the Guptas losing some of their border provinces to the Huns. These hoards were presumably left buried by the rich inhabitants of the border towns while fleeing to save their lives from the Hun aggression.

It is unfortunate that the Guptas, unlike the Mauryas, never extended their empire in the North to the natural frontiers of India. Even during the period when the Gupta empire was at its zenith, Punjab was not under the direct rule of the Imperial Guptas. Therefore, they had to build their checkposts somewhere on the banks of the River Sutlej. The infiltration of Huns into the Indian soil could not, therefore, be effectively checked and the people of Bayana, Agra, Delhi and neighbouring areas had to evacuate their homes on several occasions. That is why the Bayana Hoard theory of Dr. Altekar seems quite plausible.

The vulnerable situation then prevailing has been aptly inscribed on Junagarh Pillar. On reading it one gets the impression that the Gupta Empire actually succumbed to foreign aggression and internal risings, and Skanda Gupta, by his bravery and courage, re-established the prestige of his dynasty which was just on the brink of total extinction. This line reads as follows: 'Who, with his own armies established again (his) lineage that had been made to totter....(and) with his two arms subjugated the earth (and) showed mercy

to the conquered people in distress (but) has become neither proud nor arrogant, though his glory is increasing day by day; and whom the bards raise to distinction with (their) songs and praises". (Fleet). According to another source some of the bordering states, which had been conquered by the strong arms of Samudra Gupta and Chandra Gupta II, took advantage of this critical situation. They asserted their independence and worsened matters for Gupta rulers. Some contemporary religious records indicate that Kumara Gupta I grew disgusted with this constant struggle and the prevailing anarchy and disorder in the country. In sheer disappointment he abdicated in favour of Skanda Gupta, the ablest and the most capable of his sons, and joined the Buddhist religious orders, and renounced this world. Dr. B.P. Sinha, however, thinks that besides these two national dangers a third factor was also responsible for this disappointing situation. This was perhaps the worst. It was the war of succession for the Imperial Gupta throne, among the sons of Kumara Gupta I. This war made the life of the people miserable and encouraged the border states and the Pushyamitras to gain an independent position for some time. Skanda Gupta, however, not only defeated his brothers but also restored the fallen fortunes of his family.

It took Skanda Gupta almost five years to restore law and order which had been shaken badly. In this connection it will be apt to refer to the 8th Line of Bhitari Stone Inscription which reads : "By whom,—having with daily intense application, step by step attained his object by means of good behaviour and strength and politic conduct." (Fleet). Skanda Gupta was no doubt successful in his object but the continuous invasions of the Huns and internal risings of Pushyamitras did not give him even a breathing time. This was why he could not restore that prosperity which India experienced under Chandra Gupta II. However, he laid down his life for the cause of Indian independence, winning for himself the highest praise, as the only hero in the two continents of Asia and Europe who successfully vanquished the nomadic hordes of the Huns. Dr. V.A. Smith is not justified to pre-

sume that "Skanda Gupta's empire succumbed to the repeated Hun attacks and finally perished after his death".

WHO SUCCEEDED KUMARA GUPTA I?

Different theories have been advanced regarding succession after Kumara Gupta I. Dr. Sinha, however, has tried to clear the mist as follows, although his approach also suffers from contradictions and inconsistencies.

Historians, like Dr. V.A. Smith, Dr. Ray Chaudhury and Shri Panna Lal, believe that Kumara Gupta I was succeeded by Skanda Gupta. Dr. Smith says that Puru Gupta was presumably a younger brother of Skanda Gupta and succeeded him. He was succeeded by Narasimha Gupta who was followed by Kumara Gupta of Sarnath Inscription and Bhitari seal. According to this group of writers, Kumara Gupta of Bhitari Seal, was also of Sarnath Inscription, who was succeeded by Buddha Gupta, the greatest of the later Gupta rulers. Dr. Majumdar also seems to agree with this view but he refuses to admit that Skanda Gupta and Puru Gupta were two separate persons. He is rather inclined to believe that Puru Gupta and Skanda Gupta were two names of the same person and there was no partitioning of the empire or a war of succession after Kumara Gupta. This view is also supported by historians like Allan, Dr. B.C. Sen, and Mr. R.N. Dandekar. Mr. R.D. Banerjee supports this view with some slight modifications, although it is the most popular view and is almost an accepted fact.

Dr. B.P. Sinha, however, has raised some objections. He rejects the chronological list of the rulers given by the above mentioned historians, as the arguments on which their theory is based are not sound and convincing. His first objection is the very short duration of period for the reign-periods of so many rulers which does not look a reality. Budha Gupta was ruling over the greater part of Northern India in 475-76 A.D. The last known date of Skanda Gupta is 466 A.D. There is, therefore, no other alternative but to accommodate all these rulers within this short period of about eight years i.e. 467-475 A.D. The

writers have tried to over-rule the objection of Dr. Sinha by drawing a parallel with later Moghuls when within a short time as many as six rulers ascended the throne. The analogy may, however, not be applicable without qualifications. The situation during Gupta period was not so critical as it was during the later Moghul period. The nobles were not so strong as to dethrone a king according to their sweet-will. There were no court rivalries although it is a fact that Gupta Emperors were facing an equally embarrassing situation from their enemies both within the country and outside it. The discovery of a seal of Vishnu Gupta at Nalanda has created further complications. The rulers who have to be assigned to this short period now are Puru Gupta, Narasimha Gupta, Kumara Gupta, Vishnu Gupta besides three other rulers, Dradasaditya, Prakasaditya and Ghatotkacha Gupta. All of them, in accordance with the records, must have ruled before Budha Gupta. If we agree to this view the period of rule which we can assign to each one of these predecessors of Buddha Gupta comes to a year and a half, which is absurd. We thus feel very reluctant to agree with this view, in spite of the fact that it has been advanced and supported by some historians of known fame.

Mr. R.G. Basak tells us that the empire of Kumara Gupta I was partitioned between his two sons, Skanda Gupta and Puru Gupta immediately after his death. The immediate successor of Skanda Gupta was Kumara Gupta II of the Sarnath Inscription. He was succeeded by Budha Gupta who in turn was followed by Bhanu Gupta. This line of rulers carried on their government over the greater part of Northern India for several decades. Similarly, the second part of the empire went to Puru Gupta who established his independent government somewhere in the South of Bihar. He was succeeded by Narasimha Gupta, who was followed in succession by Kumara Gupta of Bhitari seal. These rulers governed for several decades until their lineage was overthrown by internal dissolutions and external aggressions. Mr. Basak has tried to support his view on the basis of Junagarh Rock Inscription, which reads as follows :

"The goddess of fortune and splendour, of her own accord selected (Skanda) as her husband....having discarded all (the other) sons of the king as not coming up to her standard". From this line he has tried to prove that the greater part of empire went to Skanda Gupta who was selected by the goddess of fortune as her husband" in spite of the fact that Puru Gupta had a better claim to the throne, being the son of Kumara Gupta I from the chief queen Ananta Devi. It was, perhaps, because Skanda Gupta was considered to be the ablest of all the princes to shoulder the responsibilities of the state when the country was passing through a very critical situation. Skanda Gupta, through courtesy, permitted his brother Puru Gupta to carry on as an independent ruler in a region of the empire. Similar was the case with his successors who also were not disturbed by the successors of Skanda Gupta. It is difficult to accept this theory in the face of the fact that there was great rivalry and jealousy between Puru Gupta and Skanda Gupta and also between the mothers of the two princes during the life-time of Kumara Gupta I.

Dr. B.P. Sinha writes that the explanation that Skanda Gupta and his successors through courtesy permitted Puru Gupta and his successor to rule independently in a part of the empire does not seem to be convincing. It is known for a fact that Budha Gupta ruled from Bengal in the East to Malwa in the West and had no rival in the whole of Northern India. It is not clear how Budha Gupta or any of his predecessors permitted the line of Puru Gupta to function independently when the rulers of the latter group had established their rule after a revolt against the authority of Skanda Gupta. We come across wars of succession even in the earlier Indian history. It is said that Asoka came to the throne after murdering his 99 brothers. Samudra Gupta too had to fight his brother Kaca for the Gupta throne. Chandra Gupta II murdered his brother Rama Gupta to get the Gupta throne. If these be the hard facts of the early Indian history how could the successors of Skanda Gupta or Skanda Gupta himself be broad-minded enough to tolerate an independent government, parallel to their own, in Northern India especially when they was strong enough to crush it.

Mr. Hoernle gives yet another interesting theory. He is of the opinion that Puru Gupta and Skanda Gupta were not two different persons. Skanda Gupta was in fact the name of the ruler as a prince. Later on, after he had defeated the Pushyamitras and the Huns, he wanted to style himself as a greater Gupta King, perhaps the greatest of the later Guptas, and took up the proud title of Puru Gupta, i.e. a greater Gupta.

In his first argument he says that from the study of Bhitari seal it is quite evident that Puru Gupta was a son and immediate successor of Kumara Gupta I. Bhitari Pillar Inscription on the other hand describes Skanda Gupta as a son and successor of Kumara Gupta I. From these two inscriptions it seems probable that Kumara Gupta and Puru Gupta were the two names of the same person and were not two different princes. His second argument is based on the account of Takakusu. Takakusu mentions one Paramarthas Vikramaditya as a patron of Vasubandhu who was none else but Skanda Gupta. We are also told that he was the father of Baladitya, as the latter was known as a crown prince during his reign. The contemporary record tells us that Baladitya was the earlier name of Narasimha, a son of Puru Gupta. If it is true then Skanda Gupta should be none else but Puru Gupta.

A contemporary account known as Arya-Manjusri Mulakalpa indicates that Mahendra (Kumara Gupta I) was succeeded by Sakara, (Skanda), that Sakara had more than one name and the name of his immediate successor was Bala (Baladitya or Narasimha). Hence it can be concluded that Skanda Gupta and Puru Gupta were two names of the same person.

The theory may also be supported on the basis of the similarity of the coins of Puru Gupta and Skanda Gupta. Dr. R.C. Majumdar and Dr. Krishna Deva support this approach.

Dr. B.P. Sinha, however, very strongly refutes the different arguments advanced in support of this theory. He writes that the arguments are interesting but deceptive.

Writing about the account of Arya-Manjusri Mulakalpa, he says that the account under reference is a religious book and does not seem to have been written for historical purposes. Further, it is certainly not a contemporary account and was in all probability written during the medieval age. It leads one to conclude that Chandra Gupta II was the immediate successor of Samudra Gupta. The modern belief, however, is that Rama Gupta, and not Chandra Gupta II, succeeded Samudra Gupta. This and several other such unreliable versions have rendered this account very dubious, which cannot be accepted without a critical screening. It is not known when this book was written. It may have been written at a very later date on hearsay.

Dr. B.P. Sinha also does not accept the view that Skanda Gupta changed his name to Puru Gupta after his victory over the Huns and the Pushyamitras. Devaraja is the other name of Skanda Gupta. No where Puru Gupta has been mentioned as the second name of Skanda Gupta. Dr. Sinha refutes the theory of the similarity of coins and writes that it is also not very strictly relevant and dependable. Puru Gupta and Skanda Gupta ruled India one after the other and there was a very brief interval in the issue of the coins of the two, perhaps no interval as Puru Gupta was not destined to rule for more than a few months. Even, perhaps during this period, when a conflict for succession started, the two princes might have simultaneously issued their coins to commemorate their accession to the Imperial Gupta throne. Therefore, there could be a possibility of similarity of coins of the two. The theory can also be rejected on the plea that while Puru Gupta is known by the title of Shri Vikramah or Vikramaditya, Skanda Gupta was always called as Kramaditya in his coins. It is clear that Puru Gupta and Skanda Gupta were two different persons and were not identical. Mr. R.D. Banerjee was justified when he wrote that, "In the coinage of the Imperial Gupta dynasty there is not a single instance in which the two personal names of the same emperor have been used on his coinage." Some of the other great rulers like Samudra Gupta, Chandra Gupta II and Kumara Gupta, used more than one name or title

on their coins and, in fact, it is on the basis of these coins that different theories about the qualities and the achievements of the different rulers can be confirmed. Similarly Dr. Sinha also does not agree with the identification of Paramartha Vikramaditya with Skanda Gupta as given by Takakusu in his account. He feels that the dates of the incidents are not very clear and it would be more appropriate not to believe in this theory.

Shri N.K. Bhattasali gives quite a different story. He is of the opinion that Skanda Gupta and Puru Gupta were brothers, and Puru Gupta, at the time of the death of Kumara Gupta I, was only a child of four years. The successors of Kumara Gupta I, according to him, were Skanda Gupta, Kumara Gupta of Sarnath inscription, Buddha Gupta, Bhanu Gupta and Puru Gupta. He further writes that as Puru Gupta was of advanced age at the time of his accession he died soon thereafter and was succeeded by his son Narasimha. The presumption of Mr. Bhattasali has been refuted very forcefully by Dr. B.P. Sinha. He writes that this assumption is incorrect. In accordance with this chronological order there would be a gap of about 50 years between Skanda Gupta and Puru Gupta which is a very long period for Puru Gupta to wait for the throne. The theory does not seem to be convincing as from some of contemporary records it becomes clear that Skanda Gupta died without a son. If this was the case then why Puru Gupta did not immediately succeed Skanda Gupta and how there were so many other rulers in beween the two.

Dr. B.P. Sinha holds that there was a war of succession among the sons of Kumara Gupta I immediately after his death. The rivals for the Gupta throne were Skanda Gupta, Puru Gupta, Ghatotkacha Gupta and presumably Chandra Gupta III. He further writes that Skanda Gupta was not the immediate successor of Kumara Gupta I and the theory of such writers, as opine that it was a peaceful succession, is incorrect. Junagarh Rock Inscription tells us that "The goddess of fortune and splendour of her own accord selected Skanda Gupta as her husband....having discarded all (the other) sons of the king as not coming up

to her standard". From this statement it becomes clear that Skanda Gupta had many other brothers and he was considered as the fittest of them to succeed to the Imperial Gupta throne.

Another important point to be borne in mind is that Skanda Gupta does not seem to be a legal heir to the throne of Imperial Guptas. It is because he was not a son of Kumara Gupta I from the chief queen. In no inscription or any contemporary reference a mention has been made of the mother of Skanda Gupta along with the Gupta emperor, Kumara Gupta I. Presumably, Puru Gupta had a better claim to the throne as he was the son of Kumara Gupta I from Mahadevi Ananta Devi, the chief queen of the Gupta emperor Kumara Gupta I. Similarly, we come across names of several other queens in the Gupta records like Mahadevi Datta Devi and Mahadevi Dhruva Devi, mothers of Chandra Gupta II and Kumara Gupta I respectively. The omission of the name of the mother of Skanda Gupta, which was Devaki as is known from Junagarh Rock Inscription, seems to be intentional as she did not probably enjoy the same position as was enjoyed by the mother of Puru Gupta. She might be one of the secondary wives of Kumara Gupta I and thus Skanda Gupta did not enjoy a sound legitimate claim to the Gupta throne like Puru Gupta. On the basis of this better claim, Puru Gupta can be taken to be the immediate successor of Kumara Gupta I to the Gupta throne.

The preceding account supports the theory of Dr. Sinha that there was a war of succession immediately after the death of Kumara Gupta I. Puru Gupta was not as capable as Skanda Gupta. It becomes clear from the fact that Kumara Gupta I appointed Skanda Gupta and not Puru Gupta as the commander of that army which had been sent to meet the Huns and to defend the borders of India against the foreign aggressor. The possibility of the war of succession also becomes evident from Line 12 of Bhitari Stone Pillar Inscription of Skanda Gupta, which reads : "who (Skand Gupta), when (his) father had attained the skies, conquered (his) enemies by the strength of (his) arms and

established again the ruined fortunes of (his) lineage, and then crying "the victory has been achieved" he took himself to (his) mother whose eyes were full of tears of joy, just as Krishna when he had slain (his) enemies betook himself to (his) mother Devaki". The critical situation also becomes evident from another line of this inscription (i.e. Line 14) wherein it has been stated that Skanda Gupta re-established his lineage, by the strength of his arms, which was tottering.

From these two lines it becomes evident that Skanda Gupta had to fight for his case. He had also to use force to justify his claim for supremacy over the different Indian states and for the re-establishment of Gupta ascendancy that had been challenged in the different parts of India. The reference to Krishna and Devaki is also significant: it gives clue to the mother of Skanda Gupta who had to suffer humiliation during the life-time of her husband as she did not enjoy a supreme position at the royal court. The victory of her son was the turning point for her. It made her a queen-mother of India, with a supreme position, which she could not enjoy even during the life-time of her husband. This unexpected turn of the tide and arrival of her son, victorious from the battle-field, made her shed tears of joy. Whether it was a victory of justice over the devilish forces, as is evident from a comparison with Lord Krishna and Devaki or otherwise, cannot be commented upon.

Lot of controversy is going on about the identification of Gatotkacha Gupta. A specimen of his coins has been found in the Leningrad museum. Some of the writers have attributed this coin to the father of Chandra Gupta I but it does not seem to be correct. No gold or silver coin was issued by the predecessors of Chandra Gupta I. His ancestors in fact did not enjoy any independent position. Dr. Sinha presumes that Ghatotkacha Gupta was a son of Kumara Gupta I and was a claimant to the Gupta throne. At the time of Kumara Gupta's death Skanda Gupta was away, fighting the Huns. Puru Gupta, being at the court, enjoyed a very favourable position. He, therefore, declared himself as the ruler of India and issued coins in his name.

Taking advantage of the situation, Ghatotkacha Gupta also declared his independence and issued golden coins of Archer type, to commemorate his independence. A coin of this category is available in St. Petersburg collections. Only one coin of this ruler is available so far which further confirms the conviction that Ghatotkacha Gupta did not rule for a long time and was most probably defeated by Skanda Gupta in the war of succession.

Dr. Sinha puts forward the name of another Gupta prince Chandra Gupta III as another possible rival claimant to the Gupta throne. He writes that Chandra Gupta III also took up the proud title of Vikramaditya and issued coins in his name.

The whole of this discussion leads us to the conclusion that there were four royal princes fighting for the Gupta throne. They were Puru Gupta, Skanda Gupta, Ghatotkacha Gupta and Chandra Gupta III. Puru Gupta, being at the centre, was the first to succeed his father and to issue coins in his name.

Others followed suit and declared their independence in their respective regions, where they had been appointed as governors by their father during his life-time. This resulted not only in the disintegration of the empire but also in the spread of anarchy and disorder, especially when the Pushyamitras had already revolted and the Huns were knocking at the doors of India. This led to the tottering of the Gupta empire. Indiscipline and corruption became the order of the day. The Huns over-ran the greater part of North-Western India. Puru Gupta, who was the immediate successor of Kumara Gupta I, could not control the situation and created further complications. Skanda Gupta rose equal to the occasion. He defeated the Huns and the Pushyamitras. However, when he found his brother in position at the royal court he put forward his claim to the throne. Puru Gupta took up this challenge but was defeated and Skanda Gupta after his victory hastened to his mother to convey to her this good news. This theory gains ground because of the fact that when Skanda Gupta died without a son and was succeeded by the children of Puru

Gupta, in order to take their revenge, they made it a point to omit the name of Skanda Gupta from all the official records. That is why nowhere in the chronological order the name of Skanda Gupta appears amongst the later Gupta rulers. Skanda Gupta might have similarly marched against his two other rival brothers and defeated them one after the other.

Dr. Sinha admits that on the basis of certain facts, this chronological order can be questioned. But in the present circumstances this seems to be the most appropriate and convincing one. The objections which can be raised against this view-point are three. The first is that the last known date of Kumara Gupta I on record is 136 G.E. The first known date of Skanda Gupta also is the same. This creates some apprehension. This, however, can be ruled out as there could be the possibility of Kumara Gupta I dying sometime in the earlier part of the year and the accession of Skanda Gupta sometime during the later part of that year. Puru Gupta, as we know, was destined to rule for only a few months and got this chance as he was present at the court and enjoyed a very strong legal position. Skanda Gupta, being busy in fighting with the Huns and Pushyamitras, could not immediately return to the court to press his claim, and thus Puru Gupta got the chance to rule for a few months.

The second objection which may perhaps be raised by the critics of this theory is that the coins of the later period of Skanda Gupta are debased and are of an inferior quality when compared to those of the earlier period. Allan bears out this belief. The superior type of coins were presumably issued during the earlier part of his reign and the inferior type of coins were issued during the later part. The coins of the superior type, which are presumed to have been issued during the earlier years, resemble with, and are in no way inferior to, the coins of Kumara Gupta I. Dr. Smith also agrees with this view. According to him the financial stringency of the administration of that period is borne out by the abrupt debasement of the coinage in the later years of Skanda Gupta. The gold coins of the earlier part of his

reign are comparable, both in weight and in fineness, with those of his ancestors. However, in the later period, while these were increased in their gross weight in accordance with the ancient Hindu standard of the suvarna, a definite decline noticeable is in the amount of pure gold in each piece from 108 to 73 grains. The inferior coins of the later period, according to the critics of this theory, resemble and are of an equal weight with the coins of Puru Gupta. Thus Puru Gupta succeeded Skanda Gupta and was not his predecessor. Dr. Sinha, however, very boldly meets this challenge. After a chemical analysis of the coins of Skanda Gupta, he has proved that Skanda Gupta issued coins of an almost equal purity throughout his reign. The notion that debasement of currency took place in his later years is incorrect.

The third objection, raised by Shri P.L. Gupta, is that if Skanda Gupta had been the successor of Puru Gupta, he would not have spared the latter's sons after his succession to the Gupta throne. Skanda Gupta died without a son and was succeeded by the children of Puru Gupta. It is a matter of history that after one's accession, a king never permitted the children of his rivals survive him and killed them on one pretext or the other. Although there are some hard realities in the argument advanced by Shri P.L. Gupta yet it cannot be accepted as a gospel truth. Skanda Gupta was said to be a brave man. He defeated Puru Gupta and there was none to challenge his position both in war and peace. He could thus, like a truly brave man, spare the children of his brother as there was no immediate danger from them to his Government. As Skanda Gupta was childless he was succeeded by the children of Puru Gupta, who, acting with a spirit of revenge, omitted the name of Skanda Gupta from all the official records and the dynastic chronological order.

Accession of Skanda Gupta

Skanda Gupta did not have a peaceful succession to the Imperial Gupta throne. He had to cross swords with

Puru Gupta besides fighting out his claim against his two other rival brothers, Ghatotkacha Gupta and Chandra Gupta III, who immediately after the death of their father, revolted in their respective regions and declared their independence. The tragedy was highlighted by the fact that he could not confide in any of his courtiers. The old nobles thought him to be a usurper and were not happy to see him on the throne. He had, however, endeared himself to the army and justified his claim by the defeat of all his rivals, perhaps the best claim of his superiority. By defeating the Huns and his brothers and suppressing the revolt of the Pushyamitras, he proved himself to be the fittest of the princes and perhaps the only person who could save both India and the Gupta empire from disintegration or becoming a pawn in the hands of the foreigners. Besides he also made himself popular with the frontier people, crushed by the atrocities of the Huns. He was a saviour of the nation for them and enjoyed their whole-hearted support. Fortunately for him, the Gupta army was under his control. This big advantage helped him to silence all the opposition and Puru Gupta had to vacate the throne for him as he was incapable either to face his brave brother in the battlefield or to control that troubled situation. Puru Gupta had never been in the thick of the battle. Being a son of Kumara Gupta from Mahadevi Ananta Devi he had always lain on a bed of roses and had no experience of a war. He thus proved incapable of facing the grand army of Skanda Gupta, which immediately after his victory against the Huns and Pushyamitras, surrounded the capital of the Imperial Gupta empire. The inborn capability of Skanda Gupta, tested in the times of acute national crisis, must have enabled him to succeed in his bold attempt against the armies of Puru Gupta if at all there was any such struggle. Dr. Altekar, however, does not agree with the view that there was a war of succession after Kumara Gupta I. According to him the position of Skanda Gupta must have been unchallengeable after he had just crushed the power of the Pushyamitras. It was very unlikely, therefore, that Puru Gupta could have thought it expedient to put forth his claim at that time. Dr. Radha Kumud Mookerjee also

holds a somewhat similar opinion and seems disinclined to agree with the view that there was a war of succession after the death of Kumara Gupta I.

A critical study of the different accounts, contemporary as well as later, enables us to conclude that although Skanda Gupta was not a son of Kumara Gupta from his favourite queen, yet he was greatly loved by his father for his devotion to duty, sincerity, straightforwardness, qualities of head and heart, able generalship and bravery. In spite of the fact that his legal position for succession was not as strong as that of Puru Gupta, Kumara Gupta I wished to see him as his immediate successor as he was the man of the hour. His appointment as the warden of the marches and as the head of selected generals and soldiers supports this. Puru Gupta did wish, and perhaps actually did take the reigns of government in his hands, as is clear from his coins but fearing the consequences of an open conflict with Skanda Gupta, submitted on the latter's return (with the victorious armies), abdicated in his favour and so avoided bloodshed which would have proved suicidal both for him and for the Gupta empire. It was perhaps due to this amicable settlement of succession that Skanda Gupta spared Puru Gupta and his family and his sons, and the grandsons of Puru Gupta later on succeeded Skanda Gupta, the latter being childless.

Skanda Gupta had to face many problems immediately after his succession. The continuous invasions from abroad coupled with internecine war were responsible for the demoralization of the Gupta Administration. Indiscipline, disobedience, anarchy, dishonesty, disorder and corruption were the order of the day. That India, about which Fahien wrote a few decades before, that "People are rich and prosperous. They have the liberty of speech, expression and movements" was passing through a very troubled period. Life was unsafe. Government officials had forgotten their duties and there were revolts in the different parts of the empire. He took the local representatives into his confidence to rid the society of corruption, indiscipline and all other such elements as were dangerous to the security of the

empire. The second line of Junagarh Rock Inscription corroborates this: "who has developed heroism by arms and plucked (and utilized) the authority of (his local) representatives, who were so many garudas, (and used it as) an antidote against the (hostile) kings who were so many serpents, lifting up their hoods in pride and arrogance".

The Junagarh Rock Inscription states that the earlier period of Skanda Gupta was very critical. The situation was very stormy and the ruler had to pass his nights on bare earth several times when fighting with his enemies. He showed so much of his courage and able generalship that not only the people in India but also the Mlechchhas, the popular name for the Huns, sang songs of his qualities as a warrior. Contemporary records maintain that it took him about 12 years to suppress the revolt of the Huns. Some of the other records, however, indicate that he spent the whole of his life in a struggle with the Huns. One of the chief causes of the debasement of his coins during the later part of his career was that the royal treasury was exhausted to meet the expenses of increased armed forces for fighting the Huns. But the hordes of Huns could not be kept away from the Indian borders for long. They were successful in establishing their small posts on the borders of India. Skanda Gupta fought many a battle with them. A vivid description of one of these engagements, given in the Bhitari Stone Pillar Inscription, is interesting. It reads as follows: "By whose two arms the earth was shaken, when he, the creator (of a disturbance like that) of a terrible whirlpool, joined in close conflict with the Huns;....among enemies.. arrows....proclaimed....just as if it were the roaring of (the river) Ganga, making itself noticed in (their) ears." (Fleet) Dr. Smith, however, holds that the resistance to the Huns was growing weaker day by day. Skanda Gupta could not resist their onslaughts during the later years of his reign and presumably succumbed to their forces. It is unfortunate that even at such a critical juncture Indians could not unite and offer a strong front to the foeign aggressors. When Skanda Gupta was busy fighting the Hun menace, the Vakatakas stabbed him in the back by hostile

aggressions against his forces already being taxed to the extreme.

After defeating all his possible rivals and suppressing internal revolts, Skanda Gupta consolidated his defence and took to the pressing demand of the hour i.e. rationalization of the administration of the state, which had been very adversely affected by the internal risings and foreign aggressions. The institutions of law had not been functioning for the last several years and "might is right" was the rule of the time. The two rulers, i.e. Kumara Gupta I and Skanda Gupta, in fact, could spare no time for the administration of the state. After the restoration of the order, which according to the records was by the 5th year of his reign, Skanda Gupta felt the urgent necessity of appointing suitable officers, who could restore old prosperity to India, for which it had been known and which even the foreign historians have praised. The officials were appointed on merits alone. Skanda Gupta made it a point to see that his subjects suffered from no injustice and there was no oppression whatsoever either from the Government officers or by the foreign aggression. Skanda Gupta was determined to have a governor of exceptional qualities. He wanted him to be a man of justice, God-fearing, modest, willing worker, and with a strong sense of duty. In Line 6 of the Junagarh Rock Inscription the following qualifications have been shown as essential for a Gupta governor, "endowed with intellect; modest, possessed of a disposition that is not destitute of wisdom and memory; endowed with truth, straight forwardness, nobility and prudent behaviour; and possessed of sweetness, civility and fame; loyal, affectionate, endowed with manly characteristics etc." (Fleet). These qualifications are somewhat similar to the qualifications prescribed for a governor by Kautilya in his 'Arthashastra'.

The Chief object behind the appointment of such officers of merit was to see the people happy and prosperous again as they were under Chandra Gupta Vikramaditya. Skanda Gupta was far-sighted enough to realise that the prosperity and betterment of the state depended upon the prosperity and betterment of the people. The contemporary records

also praise him for his qualities as a ruler. In Junagarh Inscription it has thus been mentioned. "While, he, the king is reigning, verily no man among his subjects falls away from religion; there is no one who is distressed or in poverty, in misery, avaricious or who worthy of punishment is over much put to torture".

Skanda Gupta ruled for about 13 years. A great tragedy of his time was the bursting of Sudarshana Lake which made the lives of the people of Saurashtra very miserable. This untoward event did not allow the people in this part of his kingdom to sleep for several nights as they were unable to meet this natural calamity or to think of a way to control it. Detailed account of this national calamity have been recorded in history.

Extent of Empire

The coins and inscriptions of the period of Skanda Gupta help us to know the extent of his empire. The Junagarh Rock Inscription tells us that his empire was bounded by the waters of the four oceans. He presumably ruled from Bengal in the East to Kathiawar in the West and his empire comprised practically the whole of Northern India. From the contemporary records it is evident that, in the North-West his kingdom extended as far as the river Sutlej. Punjab was never directly under the Gupta rulers. Even during the days of Samudra Gupta it was under some foreign princes, who, through diplomatic alliances, maintained friendly ties with the Gupta emperors. The Huns destroyed these small princelings and Punjab presumably formed a part of the Huns dominions when Skanda Gupta ruled over the greater part of India. The discovery of Bayana hoard of coins of the different Gupta rulers confirms this conviction. The place where these coins have been discovered was most probably on the northern borders of the empire. We also come across his coins in Bihar, Bengal, Western India, Central India, Kathiawar and Central Provinces. The coins were in circulation in those areas only where he ruled. Thus it can be safely concluded that Bihar,

Bengal, Central India, Western India, Kathiawar and Central Provinces formed a part of his empire. This has been borne out by the discovery of his inscriptions of Junagarh (Gujarat-Kathiawar), Bhitari (Ghazipur District), Kahaum (Gorakhpur District), Indore (Central Provinces) and in Bihar. He ruled over a fairly vast empire during the later years of his reign. It is true that disintegration had set in during the closing years of his father's reign and chiefs of Malwa, Saurashtra, Central India and Southern Bihar had been successful in the establishment of small independent states but the strong arms of Skanda Gupta compelled them one after the other, to surrender unconditionally. This work of subjugation of these independent states was accomplished step by step, and by the 5th year Skanda Gupta had thoroughly completed his work and fulfilled his dream.

Estimate of Skanda Gupta

Unfortunately, in the absence of a detailed record of his period, one is unable to do full justice to this great ruler. From the information, which is available, it can be unhesitatingly said that he was in no way inferior, both in qualities of war and peace, to any of the other leading Gupta monarchs. The greatness of this ruler can be determined from the difficulties which he had to face immediately after his accession and the steadfastness which he showed in overcoming them. He did not have a good claim to the throne. He, therefore, did not enjoy that much respect and love which his step-brother Puru Gupta was given both by the court and the king. He was never permitted to stay at the royal court. In stead he was always sent to the thick of the battle. Inspite of all these handicaps he worked for his country and won fame as a true patriotic son of the soil by his terrible engagements with the Huns before whom the Roman empire broke into pieces. In fact the period of Kumara Gupta I was nothing but a long record of the victories of Skanda Gupta. A hero of hundreds of battles he deserves respect and regard. At the same time he was sober and modest and never boasted of his victories in the battlefields or achievements in administration. He can thus be

put at par with Samudra Gupta and Chandra Gupta II, if not above them. A ruler of an average ability would not have succeeded in handling so critical a situation. He is to be accredited for the restoration of peace and order, of which the people had grown unaccustomed, since the invasions of the Huns and the internal revolt of the Pushyamitras. Skanda Gupta showed an exceptional ability at this critical juncture and by his farsightedness, successfully overcame all these difficulties within an appreciably short span of five years.

He next turned his attention towards the problems of the country, and like a thorough administrator, was in a position to assert that there was none in the country who was distressed by poverty or who did not fulfil religious obligations. Love for peace and prosperity became a passion with the people. Some of the writers have tried to prove that the last years of his period were not so good and the economic bankruptcy of the Government was visible from the issue of inferior type of coins. Dr. Sinha, however, does not agree with this view and feels that both the government and the economy of the country were as strong at the time of his death as these had been during the early years of his reign. We admit that Skanda Gupta, unlike his predecessor, could not devote much of his time either towards the social aspects or to the reforms of the currency; not many varieties in the coins of his period are available. It does not in any way indicate that the Government had grown weak or the country was facing an economic crisis. Maintenance of such an efficient control over the administration in the times he had to face is miraculous.

From the Junagarh Rock Inscription we gather that Skanda Gupta, in order to reform the administration of the state, made it a point to appoint very capable persons, as his governors, in the different parts of his empire. He personally appointed people to the high posts and looked into the minutest details of the state. That is why nowhere favouritism or injustice was found in any branch of the administration of the state.

From the religious records of the time we gather that although Skanda Gupta was a militarist yet he did spare time and took part in the religious activities. He was very particular to see that every person in his state fulfilled all his religious obligations. Himself, he was tolerant and held liberal religious views. He liberally endowed and maintained the religious places of the different faiths. Both Hinduism and Buddhism have complimented him for his religious tolerance.

He attained perfection in both the arts of war and peace. He impresses us by his greatness and compels us to call him a great hero of the Indian independence, who sacrificed his peace, perhaps his family life, for the sake of his people.

Later Days of Skanda Gupta

Dearth of historical data makes it impossible for a realistic evaluation of the later days of Skanda Gupta's regime. But for his inscriptions and coins, which have been found in the different parts of India, there is no other historical record at our disposal to give a definite idea about his later days. A few decades earlier it had been agreed to, in general, by historians that the last years of Skanda Gupta were quite dark and Shri R.D. Banerji and Dr. V.A. Smith went to the extent of saying that he perhaps lost his life, fighting against the Huns. The basis for this dark picture, drawn by some historians, was the so-called inferior type of his only specimen of gold coins which according to them were issued during his later days.

Dr. Sinha, however, after a chemical analysis of these coins has proved beyond doubt that these are in no way inferior to the coins issued by Skanda Gupta during the earlier part of his reign. The theory needs a very critical examination.

Shri R.D. Banerjee has gone a step further. He has very much criticised Skanda Gupta and his policy towards the foreign aggressor. He is of the opinion that Skanda Gupta miserably failed to grasp the exact situation and instead of making a bold bid to meet the aggressor on the

natural boundaries of India, he permitted the Huns to enter India and to occupy the regions of Punjab before any resistance could be offered to them. In his opinion Skanda Gupta should have thought in terms of the national defence of India and not that of his empire. He should have also made all possible arrangements to defend the Northern borders. An attempt in this direction perhaps would have been more fruitful. He further adds that once the Huns entered India, they made it a point to make repeated incursions after short intervals and this did not permit the Gupta emperor to live in peace. Skanda Gupta did repulse their attacks once or twice but his resistance went on weakening. On the contrary the Huns started visiting India in larger numbers and there came a day, perhaps during the later part of his career, when the Indian resistance collapsed and the emperor lost his life in the struggle. To label Skanda Gupta as careless or to say that he lacked farsightedness, without a definite proof, would be doing an injustice to him. As stated earlier, Skanda Gupta was perhaps the only king who successfully challenged the Huns and inflicted upon them successive defeats. The Bhitari Stone Pillar Inscription tells us about the action which took place between the two grand armies and the defeat of the Huns in the struggle. It is also not clear whether the Huns actually invaded India during the later years of Skanda Gupta's reign. An inscription of Skanda Gupta tells us that his Government was intact up to the year 468 A.D.and that he had been successful in restoring peace and prosperity. He had also succeeded in uniting the greater part of Northern India under his control. Nowhere any mention has been made of the Huns aggression in any of the seals and inscriptions relating to his later period. Junagarh Inscription also states that Skanda Gupta assumed the proud titles of Kramaditya and Vikramaditya as a symbol of his greatness.

Dr. B.P. Sinha has refuted the theory of Shri R.D. Banerji and Dr. V.A. Smith on the plea that the Huns were busy in a death grip with the Persians during the second part of the 5th century and were free from Persia only by the year 484 A.D. If that was the case how could they spare

their armies for a struggle with the Indians and thus be engaged on two fronts? Rather, it would be more appropriate to say that the Huns, after their defeat by Skanda Gupta, turned their attention towards the Middle East and could never again dare steel a march into territories of India during the life-time of Skanda Gupta.

Another possibility, which made the last days of Skanda Gupta look very dark, has been advanced by some of the historians, in the Gupta-Vakataka struggle. This theory has been advanced by Mr. R.N. Dandekar. He writes that some time during the later days of Skanda Gupta, Vakatakas revolted against his authority and asserted their independence. The opportunity was offered to them by the internal revolt of the Pushyamitras and the foreign aggression of the Huns.

Mr. R.N. Dandekar also has tried to advance his theory on the basis of a probable attack from outside and internal revolt of the Pushyamitras during the later years of Skanda Gupta. A critical study of the events of his reign would reveal that there was a great anarchy and disorder during that period. From the inscriptions of Skanda Gupta, which were issued during the later part of his life, one gathers that Malwa was a part of the Gupta empire. It will, therefore, be proper to say that the Vakatakas like the Pushyamitras revolted during the earlier days of Skanda Gupta but were defeated and suppressed like the other rebels.

The last days of Skanda Gupta most probably were uneventful. There was everywhere peace and prosperity and an efficient set-up of Government machinery had been established in every province of the state. That is, perhaps, why no greater details are forthcoming of this period. The king ruled over the greater part of Northern India. Like Chandra Gupta Maurya he is accredited with the unification of India. He can thus be easily compared with the great rulers like Chandra Gupta Maurya, Samudra Gupta and Chandra Gupta Vikramaditya.

KUMARA GUPTA II

In the discussion about the successors of Kumara Gupta I it has been said that besides Kumara Gupta I there were two other Gupta rulers of this name who ruled over the Gupta empire during the later Gupta period. One of them was Kumara Gupta of Sarnath Inscription and the other of Bhitari Seal. Dr. B.P. Sinha holds that Kumara Gupta of Sarnath Inscription ruled over the Gupta empire during the period which intervened between the death of Skanda Gupta and the accession of Budha Gupta. For distinction between the two, Kumara Gupta of Sarnath Inscription may be referred to as Kumara Gupta II and the other as Kumara Gupta III. Kumara Gupta II was the immediate successor of Skanda Gupta, although his relationship with Skanda Gupta cannot be established. Some writers are of the opinion that he was a son of Skanda Gupta, as Puru Gupta could not possibly be the father of Kumara Gupta II, Budha Gupta and Narasimha Gupta, the three successors of Skanda Gupta. The presumption of Dr. Sinha is not free from criticism. It has been established in previous chapters that Skanda Gupta had no heir and was succeeded by the children of his brother. One thing is clear that Kumara Gupta II of Sarnath Inscription was different from Kumara Gupta of Bhitari Seal who will henceforth be referred to as Kumara Gupta III. The exact period of rule of Kumara Gupta II is, however, not certain but from the last known date of Skanda Gupta and the earliest recorded date of Budha Gupta it can be said that most probably he ruled for about seven years, between 468 A.D. and 475 A.D.

Skanda Gupta had left to his successor a vast and well-knit flourishing kingdom. The reign of Kumara Gupta II was uneventful. But for the discovery of his coins and seals he would have remained unknown to the history. In fact, the theory regarding the existence of two Gupta rulers, bearing the name of Kumara Gupta besides Kumara Gupta I is based on these numismatic records.

The two types of coins for these two Kumara Guptas differ in quality and weight. While the coins of the better

type are quite pure, and are artistic, the coins of inferior type lack both of these qualities. Allan has attributed better type of gold coins to Kumara Gupta II and the inferior type to Kumara Gupta III. These are Archer type coins. The superior coins can be compared with the coins issued during the period of Kumara Gupta I and Skanda Gupta. However, in their artistic finish these stand no comparison with the earlier coins and can be easily distinguished by their poor quality. They are also heavier in weight to some extent. These two considerations led Allan to call them as the issues of some later king and not that of Kumara Gupta I Mahendraditya. It was presumed some time back that two types of coins were issued by the same ruler. But they were issued from the different districts. That is why there was a distinction between the two. Their careful examination and chemical analysis, however, has revealed that the two types of coins were issued by two different rulers.

We know that after Budha Gupta, the Gupta empire gradually declined and the later rulers neither enjoyed authority over a vast region nor were their economic resources sufficient to enable them to issue pure gold coins like those of the earlier Gupta kings. It is thus that Dr. Sinha has come to the conclusion that the better coins were most probably issued by Kumara Gupta II, as the Gupta empire was flourishing then. The inferior types of coins were issued by Kumara Gupta of Bhitari Seal, known as Kumara Gupta III, who ruled sufficiently later when the Gupta empire had shrunk and due to the invasions of the Huns the economic resources had been affected very adversely. While the first type of coins (i.e. those issued by Kumara Gupta II) contained 79% of gold, the second type, i.e. of Kumara Gupta III, has only 50% of gold. The reason for this great difference between the two types of coins and the debasement in the coins of the later period may be the foreign invasions and internal disintegration. According to Dr. Sinha the two classes of coins are so different from each other in their finish, style, purity of metal, inscription and the palaeography that except for the title 'Kramaditya' and 'KU' on the obverse there is nothing to support the argument that these were issued by the same king.

The fact that Skanda Gupta was the immediate successor of Kumara Gupta I and that he was the predecessor of Budha Gupta is confirmed by the title of "Kramaditya" which he took up in his coins. This title was also mentioned by Hieun-Tsang in his account of the builder of a monastery at Nalanda. Up to this day the view taken about this ruler was that he was Kumara Gupta Mahendraditya. He has been mentioned in these records as the father and predecessor of Budha Gupta. Kumara Gupta II may be identified with the ruler referred to by Hieun-Tsang in his account.

The shortness of the period of Kumara Gupta II can be determined from the small number of coins issued by him. His exit may be of special significance to such writers as call him a son of Skanda Gupta. With his death the possible line of succession of Skanda Gupta came to an end and the descendants of Puru Gupta got the chance to take up the reigns of government into their hands. Kumara Gupta II on the whole seems to us to be of a very sober and gentle nature. From the Nalanda monastery one gathers that he took great interest in religious activities and repaired all those Buddhist monasteries which had fallen victim to Huns' aggression or were in a dilapidated or semi-ruined state.

BUDHA GUPTA

After the death of Kumara Gupta II, Budha Gupta ascended the throne in 476 A.D. He was the last great ruler of the Gupta period and is considered to be the greatest amongst the later Guptas. The Gupta empire hastened to its doom after his death and his successors were mere shadows of the greatness and splendour of the early Gupta emperors. In fact after Budha Gupta the Gupta imperialism ceased to exist and the Gupta rulers could not maintain even their inherited possessions which one after another slipped out of their hands and the great Gupta empire fell to pieces like a house of cards.

From his inscriptions, seals and coins we gather that Budha Gupta ruled over a very vast kingdom. The country

was in a flourishing condition. The central authority was strong enough to keep down the disruptionist elements. The great king left intact the vast empire which he had inherited from his predecessors. Dr. R.K. Mookerji thinks that perhaps Budha Gupta was able to recover some of the territory and prestige the Guptas lost in the troubled times of his predecessors. He has included the region between the Kalindi and the Narmada, Pundra Vardhana in North Bengal and Malwa in his empire. The fact that the empire was not only kept intact but was also extended further even up to the regions of Vallabhi may be proved from the phrase "paramabhattaraka-padanudhyata" which we come across in an inscription of Dhruvasena.

In spite of the fact that he ruled over a vast empire for a fairly long period of twenty years we do not have any concrete source of information for the details of his career. Even the exact date of his succession is not known to us. We can merely make a guess from his earliest known date i.e., 476 A.D. that he perhaps ascended the throne in that year. Similarly, we do not know the circumstances which led to his accession. Similar is the case with his parentage. Conflicting views have been advanced by the writers in regard to his relationship with Puru Gupta, Skanda Gupta and Kumara Gupta I. The earliest known date of Budha Gupta is 476 A.D. Presumably, he ruled for about 20 years as his last known date is 495 A.D. Some writers suggest that Budha Gupta was a descendent of Puru Gupta and he captured the throne by a coup d'etat, from Kumara Gupta II, a descendent of Skanda Gupta, thus avenging the defeat of Puru Gupta, who had been defeated and dethroned by Skanda Gupta in the war of succession which took place on the death of Kumara Gupta I. This is confirmed by the fact that the name of Skanda Gupta has been ignored in the chronological sequence of the later Gupta rulers prepared by the successors of Budha Gupta who were the descendants of Puru Gupta.

On the basis of a statement of Hiuen-Tsang some writers have opined that Budha Gupta was perhaps a son of Kumara Gupta I. Other historians have tried to link him

with Kumara Gupta II. However, the view that he was a son of Puru Gupta which is confirmed by the Nalanda Seal of Budha Gupta, seems to be more convincing and authentic.

From the Eran Stone Pillar Inscription which was inscribed by one of the governors of Budha Gupta, named Maharaja Surasmi Chandra, we know that his empire extended as far as the river Narbada. We can also determine the extent of his empire from some inscriptions and seals of his period which have been found all over Northern India. We also come across several coins of his period which confirm our views about the extent of his empire and other important events of his reign. In these inscriptions, which are very much akin to those of Kumara Gupta I, Budha Gupta has been depicted as a great ruler. We are also told that the administration in the country was very efficient and that the ruler was not only a great warrior and administrator but was also a great religious leader. From Damodarpur Copper Plate, Sarnath Inscription, Paharpur Copper Plate, and several other inscriptions and seals we gather that he adopted a very liberal attitude towards Buddhism. He also patronized the other religions at par with it. It was because of this patronization that the contemporary records have much praise for him.

The empire of Budha Gupta extended from the Himalayas in the North to Narbada in the South and from East Punjab in the North-West to Bengal in the East. It did not suffer any eclipse during his period. It was flourishing, and was in the same good condition as it was during the days of Skanda Gupta.

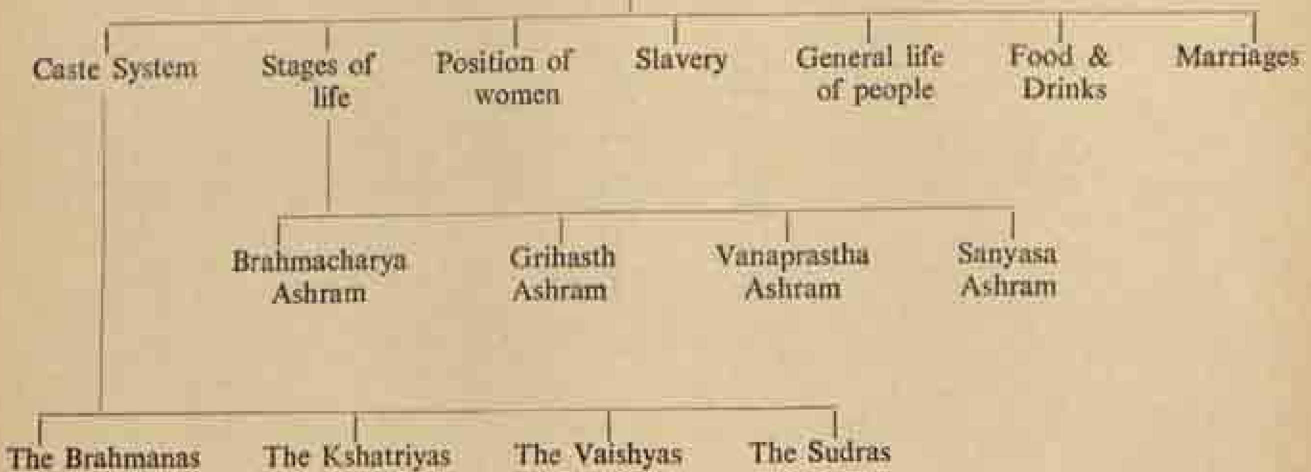
From the records of Budha Gupta it is evident that neither there was disintegration of the Gupta Empire immediately after the death of Skanda Gupta nor any division as described by some writers. Presumably, the Gupta rulers did not have to fight with the Huns who were preoccupied in their struggle with the Persians. On the basis of the discovery of his silver coins in Central India we can say that in spite of the fact that this part of the country had been in a very disturbed condition during the later days of

Kumara Gupta I and earlier days of Skanda Gupta, it still formed an integral part of the Gupta Empire. Most probably the Huns appeared in India sometime in 485 A.D. Budha Gupta warded off their attacks and did not allow them to occupy any territory during his life-time. We may presume that the Huns succeeded in capturing Malwa and some of the other border-posts after the death of Budha Gupta. Some historians, however, differ from one another on this point. They are reluctant even to agree that the Gupta empire remained intact during the life-time of Budha Gupta and did not suffer any eclipse. They do not attach much importance to the coins and seals confirming the extent of his empire. They make a comparison of the later Guptas with the later Mughal Kings, who though their names always appeared in all the firmans and were the legal emperors of India, did not enjoy any real authority. The empire, according to these writers, had torn asunder and was parcelled out among the independent lords. However, they still owed nominal allegiance to the Gupta emperors and issued coins in their names. The views of such historians are very sweeping and need careful examination and scrutiny. All the same they cannot be rejected straightaway.

One thing, however, is clear that Budha Gupta had no worthy successor and the empire broke into pieces immediately after his exit. Pending further discoveries, it would be most appropriate to say that he was perhaps the last great Imperial Gupta monarch and his successors were mere shadows. His successors, being weak, could not control the situation. The internal anarchy and disorder invited foreign aggression which ultimately resulted in the occupation of some of the North-West and Western regions by the Huns. Then began the process of slow disintegration of the Gupta Empire and the authority of the Guptas became limited to only their neighbouring regions.

PART III

Social Life


SOCIAL LIFE
Caste System
Stages of life
Position of women
Slavery
General life of people
Food & Drinks
Marriages
Brahmacharya Ashram
Grihasth Ashram
Vanaprastha Ashram
Sanyasa Ashram
The Brahmanas
The Kshatriyas
The Vaishyas
The Sudras

SOCIAL LIFE DURING THE IMPERIAL GUPTA PERIOD

The Puranas, Dharma Shastras, the works of Yajnavalkya and Narada, and the contemporary accounts of Fahien, Dandin, Kalidasa, Vijjaka, and Visakhadatta are the main sources of information for the study of social life during the age of Imperial Guptas. We find a lot of difference between the social structure of this period and that of the Vedic Age. The progress which the Indians made in the different spheres of life mainly accounts for this difference. The people had a more developed outlook as compared to the Vedic Aryans. Their attention was no more centred round the village life. There were, instead, many new towns and cities. Old tribal life was fast disappearing and many small principalities and big states had emerged from their ruins. People were no more satisfied with the mere worship of God in the open air. Instead, they had developed many rituals and ceremonies for worshipping God and various supernatural elements. In their dress and habits the people of this Age had acquired different tastes and fashions. The advanced and progressive outlook which thus took shape during the Gupta period was the distinctive characteristic which distinguishes social life of this Age from that of the earlier period.

Another factor contributing to this difference may be the influx of the foreign elements into the Indian society during the two periods before the rise of the Mauryas, and between their fall and coming of Guptas on the stage, when India was under alien domination. The Indians refused to adopt anything that was foreign. Rather, they themselves influenced the social life of the foreigners who settled in India and came into contact with their social life. The assimilation of these foreign elements into the fold of Hinduism did not, however, allow their society to remain completely isolated from the foreign influence. It did bring some new tastes and habits of the foreigners into the society which

either appealed to the Indian mind or which could not be easily given up by the foreigners and were followed by them in spite of their conversion to Hinduism. For instance, the worship of fire was not prevalent in the Indian society earlier. This was brought by the Kushans and some other warlike tribes into the Hindu society. It goes in favour of the Hindu society that in spite of the rigid principles of its caste system, its religion was very flexible. This flexibility, indeed, to a greater extent, accounts for the assimilation of the foreign races into its fold and with the passage of time, like the different currents of sea, the latter became absorbed into the vast ocean of Hinduism.

The Indian society had undergone transformation by the advent of nascent Buddhism and Jainism. While Jainism remained confined within the confines of India, doctrines of Buddhism influenced the whole of the known world. The Indian society, as it was fashioned by the Brahmanas, received an impact from these two reformist movements. It would have crumbled down completely before these currents but for the foreign invasions. This made the Indians think seriously of the futility of a few doctrines of Buddhism and Jainism which had deprived them of their martial spirit and made them fall an easy prey to the foreign warlike races. Thus the Indians could not wholly accept the social life which the two reformist movements suggested to our people. These, however, influenced the social life in India in a limited sense.

Another factor for a changed outlook of the Gupta society was due to the bitter experience of foreign domination by the Indians. This not only made them work in harmony but also developed in them a national outlook. They tried to have a national instinct in every aspect of life, so much so that even the stories told in the Indian art of the Gupta period are of Indian origin completely. Indian dress, Indian fashions and Indian tastes were the highlights of the day.

The pre-Gupta period was a time of anarchy and disorder, and the greater part of India was under foreign domination. The Puranas tell us about foreign clans like

Abhiras, Sakas, Yavanas, Bahlikas who held their sway over the greater part of Northern India. They were always fighting with one another but none of them succeeded in establishing a supreme position. These clans have been referred to in the Puranas to be of a churlish spirit and turbulent nature. They did not rule in accordance with the laws of Dharma and did not hesitate to take forcible possession of the property of their subjects. High offices of the state could be bought with money. Such were the conditions inherited by the Imperial Guptas.

The Guptas were wise enough to realise that the old standards could be restored by appealing to the sentiments of the people and rousing in them the pride for their culture. This had the desired effect and we find that the country progressed steadily till it reached the pinnacle of glory. They, however, could not enforce the strict social laws of the Vedic period. Light punishments were awarded during the Gupta period presumably with the intention to bring back gradually the social order, in conformity with the ancient standards, by development of a spirit of self-realization, among those people who could not maintain the ancient code of morale and character due to the influence of the foreigners.

The last important factor which had developed a different outlook in the Imperial Gupta society was the coming of the Indians into contact with the foreigners. Alexander brought to an end the Indian isolation from the rest of the world and exposed it to the notice of the West. Indian contacts with Europe, developed more intimately through their trading activities. India not only exported indigenous products but also imported foreign articles. Thus the Indians developed a taste for foreign goods which in turn had its impact on the day-to-day Indian social life.

The people were of a very hospitable nature. Foreigners were received warmly and given a befitting welcome. According to Fahien's testimony, the guest priests were welcomed by the resident priests, who carried their clothes

and alm-bowls for them, supplied water to them for washing and oil for anointing their feet. The liquid food was also allowed beyond the fixed hours. When the guests had rested, the resident priests enquired of them about their length of priesthood and their status. Then each guest was provided with a room and bed-room and other requisites, as provided in the rules of the Faith.

At another place he pays a glowing tribute to the Indians for their philanthropy when he writes about the people of Central India. "The elders and gentry of these countries have instituted in their capitals free hospitals, and hither come all poor or helpless patients, orphans, widowers and cripples. They are well taken care of, a doctor attends them, food and medicine are being supplied according to their needs. They are all made quite comfortable, and when they are cured they go away". (H.A. Giles)

We know it for certain that the Gupta rulers themselves were persons of literary taste. They patronised literary men of their time and this resulted in the production of some literary works which are an important record of this period. These contemporary literary works, besides the account of Fahien, are also important sources of information about the Imperial Gupta society. The Imperial Gupta period is well-known for the newly-written secular literature and also for the redaction of the existing knowledge. The Imperial Gupta rulers patronised learned men without any distinction of caste or creed. Buddhist and Jain scholars got equal respect and patronization at the Gupta court. Thus, we find the rearrangement of the epics and Puranas during this period besides the compilation of new books like Dharmashastras, law books by Yajnavalkya and Narada and Manava Dharmashastra of Manu. When we go through these books we get not only an insight into the laws prevalent then and the society but also feel a high sense of admiration for the people of the Age and appreciate their keen aptitude for the problems of the society.

A few extracts from these books will testify to

their importance as a source of information for that period. According to Manava Dharma Shastra in order to preserve the purity of the Brahmanas they were forbidden to travel abroad. There were severe restrictions on diet, education and marriage. The girls were to be married only at the age of puberty. The re-marriage of widows was prohibited and they were required to live a life of endurance, self-restraint and chastity.

At another place it is mentioned that the high-born must avoid touching a Sudra as it results in defilement. The Sudras must not study the religious texts and if one of them dared go against this law he would be very severely punished. As for example, if he was caught listening to the recital of Vedas, his ears were to be filled with molten wax. If he was caught reciting them, his tongue was to be torn out. In case he was found remembering them by heart, his body was to be cut into pieces. These strict measures, although never enforced, or strictly followed, do not leave behind a good impression of the Imperial Gupta society. It becomes evident that the Brahmanas had started exploiting their privileged position which they had manoeuvred to be restored to them after a struggle of several centuries. We are, however, told that the above rules were never put into practice. Sudras, however, do not seem to have enjoyed any respectable status in society. Their lot seems to have been very pitiable.

Joint family system existed and the eldest male member used to be the head of the family. The partition of the family during the life-time of the father was not looked at favourably. From some of the contemporary references we gather that joint family system went on even up to the birth of the grandsons and great-grand sons. From a contemporary account we get the details of a family. It consisted of eight grown up sons, many grandsons, several brothers, sisters-in-law, nephews and nieces besides the wife and several daughters. We do not get any reference in the old records where a father and his sons may have been allotted land separately or the sons may be holding lands in

their individual capacity during the life-time of their father. From these accounts we also gather that the daughters were not given a separate share at the time of the division of their father's ancestral property. However, it was always kept in view that a share equivalent to that of their brothers was spent on their unmarried life and marriage. In the absence of any son the daughter did have the right to the property of her father but only to a certain extent and with some limitations imposed by the law. All the sons were generally given equal shares. We, however, do come across some references, in the contemporary accounts, from which it becomes evident that in certain cases the eldest son got the lion's share. The father was expected to set apart a certain share of his ancestoral property for the education and marriage of his daughters.

Widow re-marriage was looked at favourably and we get references of widow re-marriage in the contemporary records. We are told that Chandra Gupta II married his widow sister-in-law Dhruva Devi. However, widow re-marriage was looked at with contempt by the orthodox section of the society even though it was permitted by the social laws of the land. Such type of marriages, however, were becoming more and more unpopular amongst the people of the higher classes. We do not find any reference about the Sati ceremony and all such widows as did not marry were expected to lead a simple and pious life. They were required not to use any perfumes and wear ornaments. It was also considered improper for them to decorate their hair. However, the practice of shaving the heads of the widows which we come across in some of the Southern and the Western regions, was not in vogue. They lived after the death of their husbands among agonies and tears. They were made to feel their loneliness forever and bear the taunts of other women of the family. Women were given high education in schools and colleges side by side with men. They also had their share in the Government services. Purda system was not common. However, ladies of the aristocratic family did not go about in the open markets without purda.

CASTE SYSTEM

The word "caste", according to Dr. Gokhale, is of comparatively late origin. It was first used by the Portuguese to imply a social arrangement designed to preserve purity of blood. Its connotation has now become so complex that it cannot be defined completely.

The origin of the caste system, which is the basis of the Indian social structure, is shrouded in mystery. At the time of their entry into the Gangetic plain the Aryans presumably were divided broadly into three categories i.e. the religious men, the warlike chieftain class and the common people. All these people, however, enjoyed equal social standing. After the reoccupation of the Gangetic plain and the enslavement of the Dravidians, the original inhabitants of India, a fourth class entered into their society. Out of hatred for this class the Aryans called them slaves and tried to keep them at a distance. Quite unintentionally the foundation of the caste system was thus laid. The Aryans belonged to the first three classes and the Dravidians formed the fourth class, i.e., Sudras. But during that period the caste system was not so rigid as it is today. The caste of a person was determined from his occupation. It was very easy to change from one caste to another. There were inter-caste marriages. There is a reference in Rig Veda which reads, "My father is a doctor, my mother is grinder of corn and I am a poet." This makes it amply clear that at that time there was much elasticity in the caste system. The situation, however, underwent considerable changes by and by and many restrictions were introduced by the Brahmans and it became very difficult to change from one caste to another.

The origin of the four castes of the Hindu society has been described in a very interesting way in the later hymns of Rig Veda. It is stated that, "The Brahamanas came out of the mouth of the Creator, the Kshatriyas from the arms, the Vaishyas from the thighs and the Sudras from the feet." The Brahmanas and the Kshatriyas were considered as privileged classes. Vaishyas also enjoyed a good position.

But the lot of the Sudras was really pitiable. They passed the whole of their life in the service of the other three communities who were considered as twice-born. A Sudra, however, could attain a privileged position after a devoted service of two births to the Brahmans. The principles of caste system were very strictly adhered to and the theory of the origin of the four castes was very strongly supported by the Dharma Shastras and the Puranas. The Brahmanas, who edited these works, and who were supreme at the court of the Imperial Guptas, made it a point to see that there was no infringement of the caste rules. Kalidasa, therefore, writes that the people solemnly adhered to the rules recommended by scriptures and the kings were always alert to put down the transgression of these rules. In fact, the Brahmanas, the so-called leaders of the Imperial Gupta society, were very enthusiastic to maintain the purity of blood.

Mr. R.P. Masani in an article on "Caste and the Structure of Society" has stated that whereas in other communities the factors which determine the difference in class and status are wealth, pedigree, or profession, in the case of Hindus the membership of a caste is determined by birth We also observe some exceptions of inter-caste marriages. These were, however, not looked at favourably by the orthodox section of the society. Kalidasa made comparison of a gandharva marriage (inter-caste marriage) with the one arranged by the sanction of scriptures and, on the basis of facts, justified the condemnation of the inter-caste marriages which did not have the general sanction of the society. The functions of the four castes were as under :—

The Brahmanas

They were responsible for the learning, teaching, performance of sacrifices, charity and for receiving charity. In fact, they were the people who were expected to read and write and thus the facts of the history of the period were at their mercy. They could write it in the way it pleased them or served their ends. Similar was the case with the reli-

gion. The different interpretations of the Vedas, the various ceremonies for marriage and deaths and the sacrifices to be made to placate gods and goddesses and the various measures of charity for achieving 'nirvana' were under their strict control.

The positions which were taken up by these Brahmanas (rather, were reserved for them) were those of the teachers, the commentators of the Vedas, and the priests at the various ceremonies and sacrifices. We also come across several instances where they were appointed as ministers and administrators. Some of them, who did not like to stay in the worldly life, became hermits and sages. This was the class of people who were noted for purity, austerity, learning and compassion. They were honoured as the most privileged class of society and were the highest in the ladder of the caste system. They were the brain of the Hindu society and sometimes acted as the king-makers.

Their struggle for supremacy with the Kshatriyas ended in their supremacy and the Imperial Gupta Age was an Age of their supremacy. They enjoyed the supreme position of advisers to the king and also of governors in some provinces where a scion of royal blood was not appointed. Horse-sacrifice and such other religious ceremonies as had been in abeyance for the last two centuries were revived under their guidance and control. The Vedas and Shastras were strictly followed in the administration of the state. They, being their sole interpretors, were thus the virtual rulers. The murder of a Brahmana was considered as the gravest crime during this Age and there was no appeal against this crime. The kings felt proud in being called as the protectors of the Brahmanas and the cows. A Brahmana could not be given capital punishment, howsoever grave might be his offence. A Brahamana could marry three wives at a time. From the contemporary account of Fahien it is evident that the priestly class enjoyed a great respect in India. According to the testimony of Fahien, the kings had to remove their crowns at the time of making offerings to the priests. Along with their families and officials of the court they had to wait in person on the

priests at table. After the meals they sat down on the carpets on the ground and did not dare to sit on a couch in their presence.

The Dharma Shastras and other contemporary records tell us that the Brahmanas were striving hard to beat the Kshatriyas in the race for supremacy. They advanced one claim after another as their privilege and reached a stage where the "Divine Right of Kings" seemed to be at the mercy of the Brahmanas. The kings were no more considered as maintaining a direct tie with the Almighty. Rather, their offerings to God could be acceptable only when these were made with the help, or through, the Brahmanas. Even in the battle-field the safety of the kings could only be ensured through the prayers of the Brahmanas. By this the Kshatriyas lost the only privilege which had made them supreme i.e., the protection of the country by their arms, by the dependence of their personal safety in the battle-field on the prayers of the Brahmanas.

In fact, Brahmanas were the makers of Kshatriyas. They proved it by converting many foreign chiefs into Hindus and bringing them within the fold of Kshatriyas. Shridhar V. Ketkar is justified when he writes in his 'History of Caste in India,' that if the Moghuls or the English had been without an organised priesthood and accepted the Brahmanas as their spiritual guides they also would have been incorporated in the caste system of India as one of the Kshatriya castes.

But for this privileged position the Brahmanas had to pay very dearly. In accordance with the code of Manu it was obligatory for a Brahmana to lead a very strict life devoted to study, sanctity and austerity. Unlike the other three classes they could not show inclination for the worldly life. They could not even earn their bread; for this they were made dependent on the devotion of the other three classes to provide for their daily food and bare necessities. It was assured only if they really distinguished themselves by rare qualities of head and heart. In case they faltered from that high altar on which they were placed they had to fall to the lowest ladder of the society i.e. Sudras.

THE KSHATRIYAS

They were supposed to be born out of the arms of the Creator and were thus expected to protect the society. To them fell the task of defending India from foreign invasions. They were also required to curb down internal insurrections. Kalidasa in his Raguvamsa has stated that the epithet of 'Kshattra' is given because the people of this caste were required to protect others.

They were a race of governors and held sovereignty for several generations. They were supposed to be of a very generous nature, benevolent and merciful. Besides kingship, the Kshatriyas held many other commanding and administrative posts in the country like that of the commanders, civil officers, and administrators. Thus, Kshatriyas formed the most powerful class in the social structure. It would not be an exaggeration if we say that the whole of the social structure revolved round them.

In the early days when there was no rigidity about the profession that could be taken up by different groups of the society, the Kshatriyas like other commoners, tilled land and the defence of the country fell on their shoulders as an additional responsibility. However, with the passage of time they started thinking it below their dignity to take to agriculture, which was left entirely to the Vaishyas. Being permanently at the helm of affairs, the Kshatriyas abused their power and became luxurious and lazy. They even neglected the defence of the frontiers of India, which was perhaps the only responsibility left to them. This resulted in foreign incursions and establishment of foreign rule. The Brahmanas tried to settle their score with the Kshatriyas, when the latter were placed in this critical situation. They exploited the situation and in order to establish their supremacy, declared all the well-placed warriors from abroad as Kshatriyas. Many high-ranking Kushan officers, Bactrian and Saka chiefs were thus absorbed into the Hindu fold as Rajputs or Kshatriyas. The idea behind this move was to make the Kshatriyas realise their helplessness before the Brahmanas.

Another effect of the foreign invasion was the loss of power and prestige of the early Kshatriya families who were now relegated to the background. After their assimilation into the fold of Hinduism and a few decades of stay in India, they not only lost their separate entity but also became indolent and inactive like the early Kshatriyas. This situation was exploited by the Vaishyas who controlled the finances of India. With a single stroke they captured power. Thus, we find Kshatriyas during the Gupta Age engaged in trade, commerce and such other professions as were once outside their sphere of work.

The Vaishyas

The Vaishyas formed the third caste of the society. They were said to have issued from the thighs of the Creator. They were mainly engaged in occupations like agriculture, cattle-farming, trade and commerce. As they controlled the finances of the state they commanded great respect in the society. With the passage of time they became very powerful and fully exploited the struggle for supremacy between the Kshatriyas and Brahmanas and came into prominence. The principles of Buddhism also helped them indirectly to achieve great power and during the Gupta period they enjoyed a high position. Some of the writers believe that the Imperial Guptas were Vaishyas.

The prosperity of India during the Gupta period was mainly due to these people. The long spell of peace gave them an opportunity to utilise fully the internal and the external resources. With the development of trade and commerce, and increase in the agricultural production, they, as a class, became the richest people in India. Since the Vedic period they had concerned themselves mainly with agriculture and live-stock farming. It was only during the Gupta period, when India developed its trade with the Western and Eastern countries, that they preferred trade to agriculture. Since that time they are the mainstay of the business activity in India. Some of them stuck to their old profession. They introduced reforms in the agricultural system. The

Government and the community gave them all the co-operation and encouragement as the interests of the state as well as the general populace were co-extensive with those of the Vaishyas.

During the Vedic Age, when life was very simple, a priest enjoyed the supreme position. The warrior class came into prominence next when the tribes with their common boundaries were engaged in internecine wars. With the disappearance of tribal life and the beginning of well-established state life, people developed a love for such professions as helped them to lead a comfortable life. People were no more interested in a mere philosophic or spiritual way of life. Neither were they very much attracted by chivalrous deeds. It was an Age of materialism and all such projects as were remunerative, appealed to them. The Vaishyas, who already had a lead in that race, went ahead of the other three castes. Thus, they got a chance to rule over India for about four centuries. Their supremacy was broken when India, with the Muslim incursions, felt the sore necessity of a warlike people. Then it was that Rajputs came to the fore-front.

As the Imperial Guptas were Vaishyas, their government naturally tended towards such projects as served to increase the wealth of the country. They devoted greater attention to trade and commerce. The country prospered and led Fahien to observe that India was passing through a prosperous stage. Through improved agriculture, cattle-farming and trade the Guptas increased the wealth of the country. For their community they won a name which was not less than winning laurels in the war. They enjoyed all concessions and privileges which they had longed for in the earlier times.

The Sudras

They were the lowest among the four classes and were stated to have issued from the feet of Virat Purusha. They are the people who have suffered the most in the Indian

society. They were to have no initiative, to bear patiently the inhuman treatment meted out to them by the other three communities, to suffer all sorts of humiliations and insults in public and were the most backward people. The Dravidians, the original inhabitants of India, formed a major part of them. Many of them were engaged in domestic agriculture and industrial labour. We do not find any mention of these people in any of the ancient literary records in spite of the fact that they contributed much to the growth of the Indian society.

Some of them were born as a result of inter-caste marriages, which did not have the approval of the society. Their children were not permitted to be the members of the higher classes and had no option but to join the lowest cadre of the society. Even among Sudras there was a further sub-division. Those of them who took up domestic agriculture or industrial labour were not untouchables. However, those of them who took up the profession of the butchers or meat-sellers belonged to the category of untouchables. They were kept at a distance by the high-born people. They were expected to live outside the cities and towns. Fahien writes that when such people entered a market place or a town, they were required to strike together two pieces of wood or to hang a small plate around their necks, as a warning of their approach so that the people may avoid contact with them and thus save themselves from pollution. It was indeed an ugly blemish on the Gupta social structure. In spite of the fact that many reformers of the time tried to do away with this social injustice they could not face the opposition of the orthodox Brahmanas and their voice remained as a cry in the wilderness.

Dr. Raj Bali Pandey has divided the Sudras into four categories on the basis of Amarkosha. The first category comprised of such people as is implied by the literal meaning of the word Sudra i.e. one that bends under affliction. All such persons as suffered at the hands of the society were called Sudras. The second category was known as Avaravarna which means low-caste. The third category was

known as the Vrashala, which meant a group of people who disregarded Dharma. The fourth were known as Jaghanyaja who were known to be in existence right from the day of creation and had issued from the feet of the Creator. In addition to these well-defined units of society there was another category of the people belonging to mixed varna which was comprised of all such people as were not born of wedlocks approved by the society and, because of the inter-caste marriages, had not been absorbed in any higher caste of society. There was also another group which was given a place in the lowest cadre because of their cultural backwardness. Thus, we find that Sudra was a vague term and this caste, in practice, consisted of many divergent groups of society which had been condemned due to some reason.

All the contemporary law-givers have condemned them for one reason or the other. They were considered as unreliable, inefficient for a responsible job, and morally deficient. Some of their occupations in reality had made them so. Many occupations like black art, quackery and dancing, which the high-born people shunned to take up, were adopted by these low caste people under stress of circumstances. These degraded them so much that Narada declared the dancers, enemies of guilds, butchers, leather-workers and quacks to be unfit to give evidence in law courts.

Thus it is evident that people of different castes took up an occupation not by the economic factors but keeping in view mainly the principles of social hygiene and morality. In fact, the main consideration before the law-givers, who demarcated between the different groups of society, was to maintain the purity of races as well as to keep high spiritual and moral standards.

We cannot straightaway condemn the attitude of hatred and untouchability adopted by the high-born people towards some classes belonging to low castes, how soever unjustified it may seem to us in the beginning. People who were included in this category, were those whose professions necessitated the handling of articles deemed impure or processes offending

the austere ideals of ceremonial purity laid down by the Brahmanas. Narada has given a list of such occupations. They had to sweep the gateways, the privy, the road, and the refuse dumps. They had to gather and remove the leavings of food, ordure, and urine. They were also assigned the task of rubbing the master's limbs.

Another interesting point to be borne in mind is that people involved in the menial jobs could not move about freely in the different parts of the country. Such people were "butchers, meat-sellers, fowlers, hunters, trappers, trainers of animals, snake-charmers, leather-manufacturers, cobblers, washer-men, mechanics, makers of weapons, carpenters, carriage-builders, basket-makers, weavers, dyers and tailors". Presumably, it was due to the reason that all such people in strange lands may not get absorbed in some other class of the society unknowingly.

Thus we find that the Sudras, in spite of the disrespect shown to them, formed an important part of the society and were carrying on many such occupations of society as were important and significant.

The division of work among the different castes as detailed above was not very rigidly enforced in the Imperial Gupta period. It was rather very difficult in a changing society of that time to maintain this division very strictly. It was, therefore, laid down that in emergencies the high-born or all twice-born may take up a profession, inferior to the occupations prescribed for them. Vasishta particularly prescribed that a person in emergency may preferably take up a profession of a status next lower to his own. In such circumstances he should never think of an occupation higher than his status. Gautama went a step further and laid down that subject to some conditions a Brahmana may take up agriculture or trade. However, he must not plough after breakfast. He should not utilize such bullocks whose noses were pierced. The fact that many people took up professions other than their own is amply borne out by the references about different castes which we come across in the Jataka literature like Brahmana physicians, Brahmana traders, Brahmana hunters and Brahmana trappers. We

also come across the case of a Kshatriya who was an archer, trader, labourer and an idol-maker. Similarly, we know that Vaishyas and Sudras took up professions which in fact were reserved for the higher castes.

From the contemporary accounts we come to know that there were further sub-castes in the different castes. For example, the Brahmanas were sub-divided into several sakas on the basis of their study of the different Vedas. The Brahmanas of Madhya Pradesh, Andhra and Orissa were known for their study of Yajurveda and these areas were known as centres of the Yajurveda Brahmanas. Similar was the case with the Brahmanas who had mastered Sama Veda. These people inhabited Gujarat-Kathiawar and U.P. Atharvaveda was widely studied in Mysore, Belgaum and Vallabhi. Rigveda similarly had its centres in Punjab and some regions of the South.

As explained earlier the caste system was not so rigid in the earlier times as it became during the later period. We come across several references of inter-caste marriages during the Gupta period. These marriages, although not looked at favourably by the society, seemed to be quite common during the Gupta period. They were known by different names. For example, if the bride happened to belong to a very low order of the society and the bridegroom belonged to a higher class the marriage was known as Anuloma marriage. When the bride belonged to some higher caste and the bridegroom was a member of some lower caste, the marriage was known as Pratiloma. Besides these we also come across several inter-racial marriages. These inter-racial marriages chiefly account for the absorption of foreigners into the Hindu fold. Except the Muslims, all the foreigners who settled in India, were absorbed into the Hindu fold so thoroughly that they lost their individuality and became part and parcel of Hindu Dharma. When the foreigners had succeeded in the establishment of their government in the different states of India, their upper classes were absorbed in the Kshatriyas, while the ordinary soldiers and common people became members of Vaishya and Sudra castes. Another point to be borne in mind about the

Gupta period is that the people did not always follow rigidly the profession of their ancestors. The Guptas themselves were Vaishyas, but by becoming the rulers they took up the responsibilities of Kshatriyas. Similar was the case with the Kshatriyas. Several of them took up commerce and industrial vocations.

We also come across several instances where the members of the royal family went against the principles of caste system and arranged inter-caste marriages. Chandra Gupta II married his daughter Prabhavati Gupta to the Vakataka King, Rudra Sen, who was the scion of an orthodox Brahmana family. In this case marriage was due to its political importance. In fact, the Gupta rulers gave much importance to political considerations and preferred them to the social and religious factors. Here it may be appropriate to mention that although the Smriti writers condemned the marriages of a Kshatriya or a Brahmana with a Sudra girl, they did not pass any stricture against such marriages. Rather, they agreed to let the son out of such marriage have a share of the property of his father.

We come across several instances where the Sudras and Vaishyas, who had the capability of soldiers, were admitted in the royal army. Perhaps it was because the Guptas themselves were Vaishyas. They, therefore, did not favour the idea of imposing a ban over the Vaishyas or Sudras joining the army. Merit was the main requisite for recruitment to the army. In spite of the fact that the caste restrictions were not strictly adhered to, the Brahmanas and the Kshatriyas were respected in the society. Their mutual relations were quite cordial. The Kshatriyas showed regard for the Brahmanas, and worshipped their gods and goddesses in spite of the temptations of Mahayanism.

During the later Gupta period the Brahmanas tried to impose restrictions on inter-caste marriages. They wanted to consolidate the caste-system and thus to ensure their social supremacy, which had been endangered by the liberal principles of inter-marriages and conversion of thousands of foreigners to Hinduism without any conditions or restrictions. They were successful in their efforts and although

they were not rulers themselves, they gained much ascendancy and influence over the rulers and were the virtual king-makers. The Kings looked to them for guidance in the matter of the laws of the state. Similarly the traders and the members of other professions depended on them, as their guidance and advice counted very much with the Gupta rulers.

The caste system has been criticised by several social reformers. It seems to be very unfair that an individual may be denied an opportunity or a profession which may be according to his ability and liking, just because he does not belong to that group of society for which this particular profession is reserved. But a critical study would reveal that the system on the whole had been chalked out to maintain an economic balance, discipline and order in the Hindu society. In our country we call it caste-system. It may be known by some other name in other countries but it is there in every part of the world. The division may be on the basis of the occupation or a class of the people but we do find it existing in England, America and other parts of the world. No community can exist and no state can function without this arrangement. Pandit Jawahar Lal Nehru writes in his 'Discovery of India' that the social structure based on the caste-system provided stability and security to the group and a sort of an insurance to an individual who was unable to provide for himself due to age, infirmity or any other incapacity.

STAGES OF LIFE

During the Imperial Gupta period the people followed old tradition of the Vedic age about the four stages of life. According to it, normally every person is expected to pass through these four stages except in the case of an untimely death. People considered it as their moral duty to observe the various conditions attached to them. These were Brahmcharya Ashram, Grihasth Ashram, Vanprastha Ashram and Sanyasa Ashram. Dr. Keiths in 'A History of Sanskrit Literature' writes, that "the scheme of four stages

is in many ways perfectly adapted to Indian life, for it starves no side of a man's life". The people did not find much difficulty in the observance of these four stages and it helped them to lead a planned life. Neither did it give anyone a chance to complain nor created any anomaly in the set-up of the society. The Brahmcharya stage covered the first 25 years of a man's life. The household life began from the 26th year onwards to the fiftieth year. Thereafter began the period of forest life known as Vanprastha stage of life. The last 25 years of a man's life were expected to be devoted in a Sanyasa Ashram, after the age of 75.

In the different contemporary records the four stages of life have been described as four Ashramas. Probably, these were termed so because the people found solace by the observance of the principles laid down for these which involved exertion of all-round efforts for the fulfilment of their duties.

Dr. Gokhale has written that during the first stage, it devolves upon the society to educate the individual and develop his capabilities. In the second stage, the individual is expected to fulfil his obligations to society. The third stage is an experience in philosophical enrichment. The last stage is spent in the quest of the Infinite. The first is, therefore, for learning, the second for acting, the third for thinking, and the fourth for realizing. By regulating the growth of the human persona lityand fixing the obligations of the individual to society and vice versa, the ashramas contributed to the continuance and enrichment of the cultural heritage of ancient India. They gave stability to life without arresting individual and social progress and it is in this that their influence on the formation and development of the cultural tradition of ancient India is the most significant.

Brahmcharya Ashram

Normally, a student was required to gain knowledge either from a private tutor if his parents could afford it or by joining a regular institution. In the latter case as soon

as the child reached the age of five he was handed over to the teacher for his education. This ceremony was known as Paridana. The student was introduced to the teacher. This process was known as Namaprichha. According to the custom, immediately after introduction, the teacher handed over a staff (Danda) to his pupil, tied a girdle around his waist and asked him to take to his studies very seriously. In the case of the children of rulers and the rich people the situation, however, was different. It was like the present tutorial system. The teacher came to his student's residence to coach him in the different subjects of study.

Several restrictions and checks were imposed by a teacher over his student during the latter's stay with the former. The student was to lead a very simple life always. He was to be of a very high moral character. He was to lead a very severe and strict celibate life. He was required never to think of a worldly life. He could not use perfumed oil or powder. However, both the boys and the girls had the freedom to exchange their views. From the description of Nalanda University we know that both the boys and the girls were permitted to take part in the dramas and other extra-curricular activities of the university and, thus to understand each other thoroughly. Occasional discussions were arranged by the teachers and the students had every right to clarify all such doubts as might crop up in their minds. The teachers thought it their duty to invite questions from their students.

The teachers commanded respect as they made a place for themselves in the hearts of their students. The latter considered the teachers as their true pilots in those stormy days of their life when their minds were not yet fully developed and were liable to founder at one step or the other due to their ignorance.

The period of study normally consisted of ten years. When a child was 16 years old he had to attend different institutions to make himself acquainted with the subjects of law and literature. In some cases, however, the study period continued up to the age of 30 years.

Liberty, equality and fraternity were prevalent in the true sense in the educational institutions. The students studying in institutions were required to wear simple clothes. They lived as equals and even the rich students could not wear exceptional or costly dresses. They were required to eat simple food which consisted of wheat, rice, barley, vegetables, butter, cheese, ghee and milk. They had to abstain from taking meat, garlic, onion and such other foods as excited passions and tended to divert their attention. They were supposed to be law-abiding and obedient to their teachers and show all respect and regard for them and elders. They were, however free to debate and discuss controversial matters with the teacher. The teachers never felt provoked when either due to ignorance or doubt the students tried to go into greater detail with them. They considered it as part of their duty to satisfy the students on a particular controversial subject or to admit frankly their weakness if they failed to satisfy them. At times they appreciated the views advanced by their students if those were convincing and were admittedly more correct than their own.

When they were admitted to the institutions of higher learning the students were supposed to take a pledge that they would exert their utmost to gain true knowledge. They were to pray to the Almighty for His help to gain knowledge.

Religion has played a tremendous role in toning up the morale of the Indian society from times immemorial. It inculcated the spirit of high ideals and a life of selflessness. Gupta rulers made religion a part of educational instructions. From the account of Fahien we know that in addition to different arts and science subjects it was obligatory for a student to gain proficiency in the Shastras, Vedas or the Buddhist religious books. The students, thus trained, led a very successful life, and won admiration and esteem wherever they went. The life of a student during the Gupta period was a life dedicated to true learning and suited to get true experience for a successful life in the future.

Education, therefore, aimed at giving full play to the capabilities of the student through proper means to

make his life useful and meaningful for him as well as the society.

Grihasth Ashram

Normally, after the completion of his educational career a student was expected to begin the second stage of life known as the Grihasth Ashram. In this stage he was required to lead the settled life of a house-holder. He was to share the responsibility of running a house with his father or elder brother if there was a joint family, and to labour harder if he had to build up an independent establishment for himself.

The life of a Grihasthi started immediately after his marriage which was generally arranged on his return to his home after the completion of his studies. This stage covered the period up to the 50th year of his life and was perhaps the most important stage of life. The Puranas attach special importance to it. The persons in the other three stages of life were dependent on a Grihasthi in many ways. It is perhaps due to this, that he enjoyed a very respectable and honourable position.

Every Grihasthi was required to perform certain social and public duties. He had to perform five sacrifices every day. These were for himself, his deceased parents, his fellow members, the creatures of this universe and different gods and goddesses.

The joint family system was in vogue during the Imperial Gupta period. There were several cases of premature deaths of married brothers and sisters. In all such cases a man was required to look after his nephews, nieces, younger brothers and sisters. It was a part of his duty to maintain them in his house, feed them from his own kitchen with the same food that he himself took. He was enjoined upon not to make any kind of discrimination between them and his own children and to treat them always at par with the members of his family in matters of food, clothing and general necessities of life. He had to show every sympathy, rather mercy, on these unfortunate persons. He was

expected to share the joint property with them. In short he had to treat them as part of his own family and to act as the head of that joint family.

As the head of the family he had many other responsibilities. He had to attend the law courts whenever there was a law suit against any member of his family. It was his duty to arrange all marriage functions and to accept and despatch invitations on behalf of the members of his family. With all these responsibilities he enjoyed one privilege. He was to be obeyed by every member of the family and his decision was final in all such differences as may arise in the family. He was, however, expected to be strictly impartial in his judgment. He also had the authority to turn out any member of the family, whom he considered as undesirable and disobedient. It will not be out of place to mention here that even the law courts paid due consideration and accepted the view-point of the head of the family when a member of the family happened to disobey the head of the family and approached a law court for redress of his grievances. In case the Grihasthi felt that he was not in a position to meet all these obligations and to fulfil all the duties, he was required to resign from this position and to make room for the next eldest member of the family.

Like her husband, who, as the eldest male member, was the head of the family, a woman was to play a similar role among the female members of the family. She was at the head of all female members of the house, who were supposed to look towards her for guidance and advice. However, whenever they felt dissatisfied with her judgment, they approached the head of the family for redress.

Although in normal circumstances, the eldest male member, as the head of the family, was to be the owner of the whole property of the family, in exceptional cases the joint family could be maintained with separate lands, property and cattle. It seems that there were no hard and fast rules in this respect. Younger brothers or some other younger members of the family, who inherited property from their parents, could own their property separately for

themselves and still remain part and parcel of the same family.

A Grihasthi was expected to serve the members of the other three stages and to repay the debt which he owed to sages, gods and ancestors by studying the sacred books, performing the various ceremonies and sacrifices, and by procreating children.

This was binding on such people as followed the holy scripts of Brahmanism. Buddhism and Jainism which thought this stage as full of suffering, preached in favour of renunciation and thus looked with disfavour on all such obligations of a man. This also was not obligatory for such people as renounced the worldly life at an earlier stage.

The various ceremonies enumerated above, when seen closely, acquaint us with the high principles of philosophy of life. The people were intelligent enough to understand that a man during the Grihasth Ashram, when he was to shoulder the heavy responsibilities of life, may feel frustrated some time. To overcome this it was made obligatory for every Grihasthi to devote some time in the early morning in praying to the Almighty. This not only gave him consolation, but also rejuvenated into him a spirit of sacrifice, selflessness, hard work and satisfaction. He had to perform regularly some ceremonies which directly or indirectly made him think of his ancestors. This obligation not only impressed on him his duty as a 'grihasthi' but also gave him satisfaction that he had been repaying the debt which was due to his ancestors. Besides these, he was also required to help and maintain all such helpless beggars or other religious persons, like the Brahmana travellers, Buddhist monks and Jaina mendicants who had renounced this world and had no body to look after them. By showing love and respect and offering prayers for other living creatures, a spirit of love and sympathy was created in the mind of a householder for all such creatures and animals as were unable to speak and were wholly at the mercy of man.

A householder who led a life in accordance with the religious obligations had no equal. He could aspire to

achieve 'Moksha' during this stage. He has been much praised in the contemporary Puranas. In Matsya Purana the houses of those who followed the tenets of caste and stages of life have been called as the tirthas. The Kurma Purana assigns the best place to the householder who is the source of the other three stages and who live on him. This stage has, therefore, been described as the only means of attaining Dharma.

Vanprastha Ashram

In accordance with the laws in vogue during the ancient period a man was required to retire to the forest as soon as he had completed the 50 years of his life. We have several interesting references in this connection in the ancient history where it is stated that the greying of hair was an indication to retire from the worldly life. During the Gupta period the people normally retired as soon as they completed their 50th year. However, there were no hard and fast rules for this. A man could retire even earlier if he felt physically unfit to take up the responsibilities of the family. In some cases an inclination and love for the retired life made people renounce this world early. Normally, a man entered into this stage when he was sure that his eldest son would be able to shoulder the responsibilities of the household. The revolution brought about by the Buddhism and the Jainism in the Indian society, however, made many people renounce the world when they were still in the prime of their life.

On his retirement, a man was expected to stay in the neighbouring forest and to enjoy the true blessings of the solitude. He was not required to think in terms of the different problems of life and prayed to God for the greater part of the day. Manu says that a man should retire from this worldly life when he finds his skin becoming wrinkled and his hair turning grey. A wrinkled face and the turning of black hair into grey were index to the setting in of the old age. These two signs, prescribed by Manu, were faithfully followed by the majority of people. Another

factor which sometimes determined the age of retirement was the birth of a grandson. Kautilya in his Arthashastra, however, gives us a more precise and better indication. According to him the person who has become incapable of copulation may be an ascetic after distributing his property and wealth. Inter alia it may be mentioned here that a man has two types of property, the one which he inherits from his predecessors and the other which is the direct result of his own efforts. According to the Hindu laws a man has no right to dispose of the property which he has inherited from his predecessors. Normally, it is to be distributed among his children in accordance with their rights. However, the property which he might have acquired through his own efforts could be disposed of or distributed by him according to his own will. He has the right to endow a part of it for religious purposes. He can give a greater share to one of his sons for whom he has greater affection. He can also give a part of that to his daughter or to any other relative for whom he has affection.

Some restrictions were imposed on a person who intended to retire from the worldly life. From the study of Arthashastra we come to know that in accordance with the rules of the society a person was not permitted to retire unless he had made some special provision for his wife and minor children. This was not applicable to major children although they might not be earning members. He could be sued in a law court and punished in case he failed to conform to the above conditions. However, if a person had major as well as minor children and the major sons agreed to look after their minor brothers, he could retire without any complications.

Some restrictions were imposed on the Brahmanas, Kshatriyas and Vaishyas even during the Vanprasth stage. They had to make all possible efforts to keep their senses in subjugation and to adopt a very determined attitude towards the renunciation of the worldly life. They were required not to show any inclination to or love for their relatives after renouncing the world and to try to forget them. They were expected to observe all the five sacrifices prescribed

for the second stage and to offer regular morning prayers. They had to entertain the Brahman travellers, although not so elaborately as during Grihasth ashram. They were required to show respect towards the creation of the Almighty.

During the Gupta period every wife had the option either to accompany her husband to the forest and to lead a life of retirement with him or to remain behind at home and live with her sons and grandsons. It was generally the degree of attraction for either of the two sides which determined the option of a woman.

There were different categories of this retired life in the forest. The first category was known as Audumbara. This included such men as were accompanied by their wives in their retired life. As they were required to observe strict celibacy and to lead a truly retired life, they had to keep a plank, known as Audumbara, between themselves and their wives, when sleeping, to avoid a physical contact. The cases where the wives did not accompany their husbands were known as Vaisinchi. This type has been very much admired for strictness and austerity which a man observed, and has been considered to be at par with the life of the great Siva. He was forbidden to talk in terms of anything that was worldly and had to observe all such practices as were meant to keep a full control on his passions and enable him to remain a true Brahmachari. The third type was known as Balakhilya. In this the man was quite free from all physical and mental attachments of the world and was devoid of all traces of pride. He developed the quality to face all the circumstances and braced himself to confront all the ups and downs of life. He was truly a mahatma during this period as he had nothing of human weaknesses left in him. The fourth category was of a much more strict character. He had to give up all types of rich diet, and pass his days on boiled rice. He had to observe fasts in order to tame his passions. Thus, physically weakened, there was much less possibility of his thinking about anything of worldly character.

A man grew weak due to the advanced age during this stage of life and did not feel interested in life. He was quite alone. When he visited the city he carried a staff in his hand which was a distinguishing mark for his no more being a worldly person. He did not stay in any pucca house and passed his days and nights on the stones and bare earth. When he visited a city to get his meals, he carried a bowl in his hand like a sadhu who had renounced the world. During the last part of this stage he did not go to a city for begging his meals. He lived on the leaves of the trees and such fruits as grew in the forests. After this a time came when he did not eat even the fruits.

By observing this type of strict life a man was able to adjust himself gradually to the growing weakness due to advanced age, when it was very difficult for him to digest a rich food. A simple food, coupled with simple habits, and freedom from worries of life, helped him very much to maintain himself properly.

When alone, he pondered over his past life and made his contribution to the society by writing down his experiences of life or passing them on to the people through stories and examples. When he reached the age of 75 years he withdrew from the society altogether. He no more observed even such distinctions as were laid down for him when coming into contact with the people. He became a true Sanyasi.

Sanyasa Ashram

It was a stage of perfect renunciation. The man had to sever himself from the worldly ties completely. He had to advise and guide the younger generation and to lead such a pious life as to become a precept to the others. Normally, he took up his place somewhere near a well where he served the passers-by by offering drinking water, etc. to them. He also undertook other easy jobs which were beneficial to the human beings. He effaced from his mind all the attachments and love for his wife and children and concentrated himself increasingly in prayers and religious ceremonies. He focussed his ideas more on death than on life. It has

been beautifully described as an age of preparation for final parting. The main object behind the discipline of life laid down for a sanyasi was to see that his end was peaceful. After ceasing to concern himself about his relatives, children, wife and other persons, he was not afraid of death and did not feel sad when leaving this world.

Kautilya says that when a person joins this stage of life, he should not enter a village. He should try his best to avoid any contact with the persons known to him. He had to get his hair, nails and beard cut off. His possessions consisted of an alms-bowl, a staff and a water-pot. He was required to beg and to remain contented with whatever the people offered to him and not to approach his children for a better fare. He had to abstain from taking meat or garlic. At night he slept on the bare earth and did not use a 'charpai'. He talked the least and instead meditated in silence. He devoted the greater part of his time in praying to the Almighty. Dr. Acharya writes that by the restraint of his senses, elimination of the feelings of love and hatred, and abstaining from inflicting any injury to the creatures, he was able to rule over his body.

This restraint and physical and mental control helped a man to face death fearlessly. In fact meditation on death for over 25 years developed in him a longing for it and a feeling of boredom with this world. He felt relieved and happy at the arrival of death. Its thought disturbed him the least and his case served as an example to the others.

After a close study of the four divisions of life and the proper understanding of the importance and purport of the discipline laid down for each we cannot help admiring the soundness of the system. It was a successful experiment and no element of the society raised any discordant voice against any type of injustice done to him under this social order. The Imperial Guptas by their personal interest in the society removed all such outmoded points as could lead to any complications.

Position of Women

During the Imperial Gupta period women enjoyed a very high position in society. The contemporary writers have hinted indirectly about it. The paintings at Ajanta portray a picture of a longing for an ideal civilisation which is the cherished dream of India even today. The social life, the role of women, their dress and means of entertainment are perhaps nowhere better depicted in detail as here. In some casual remarks Fahien has also described the position of women in the Imperial Gupta society. Dandin has described them as equal to men in all the walks of life, in the educational field, in the play-ground and in the celebration of festivities. Kalidasa has given us the details of privileges which the women of that Age enjoyed before marriage, after marriage and in their old age. We are also told of their legal position as daughters, wives and mothers.

The whole of the social structure of the time revolved round them. The higher education was still allowed to them as in the Vedic Age. In some well-placed and high class families, who traced their descent from royal families, they had the freedom to choose their life partners.

The Imperial Gupta society, like the ancient society, was passing through a very complicated stage of development. Marriage at an advanced age, which was very popular during the Vedic period, was becoming obsolete and early marriages were becoming *la mode*. Some modern writers have criticised this custom with the plea that as the girl was immature she was not in a position to understand the importance of marriage or to make a right choice if she had the privilege to select her life partner. Where the marriage was arranged by the elder members of the family, the situation was still worse. Thus a girl was completely at the mercy of her parents. The early marriage was also a big hindrance in the way of higher education.

Purda was becoming quite popular among the ladies of the higher families. They did not move about as freely as their sisters of Vedic age did. Those belonging to the middle or lower class families did not observe it. Frescoes

belonging to this period, particularly those at Ajanta, do not give impression in any way that women lived a life of isolation. In place of dresses covering the whole of body, which would have proved the practice of seclusion, there is a bold attempt in the matter of freedom of dress. Women probably moved about unveiled. They have been shown attending on the kings, going about in the streets, among common soldiers, singing before a king when he is being anointed, giving alms to beggars in the streets, carrying vessels, and performing numerous other such like duties in the open. These things in no way suggest either their isolation or their dependance on men. However, the freedom of women depicted at Ajanta, in particular their employment at wine-shops and similar other business centres where their presence could increase popularity and sale, did not represent the case of all the women of that period. Ladies of the royal family stayed in the harem behind a heavy guard. There were several instances when the girls were married by their parents against their wishes and had no alternative but to submit.

Kalidasa writes about some restrictions imposed on women. He writes that a woman must not leave the house of her husband, even if not loved or respected by him, otherwise she will lose her respect in the eyes of the people who will start suspecting her character. A woman who puts up like a slave with her husband is preferred to a woman who procures separation from her husband and lives alone. In 'Sakuntala', Kalidasa has hinted indirectly on the society of the time when he advises the heroine how she should lead her married life. She should serve the elders. She should be friendly towards the other women of the family. She should not leave her husband even if maltreated. She should show due consideration to the servants and should not boast of her riches. In this way she could become a good house-wife. Good wife did not object even if her husband married several wives. They lived together in great harmony. This is clear from a statement of 'Malavikagnimitram' according to which the noble ladies, who loved their husbands, honour them even to the extent of admitting a rival.

The contemporary records tell us that a good woman of the Imperial Gupta period devoted herself to her husband as to a deity. She looked after his comforts and always sought his guidance. She was expected to take part in the religious and social functions only on the permission of her husband. She never went out of the house or joined in sports without her husband's approval. She did not contribute even to a good cause without his knowledge. She showed respect to the friends of her husband and never laughed aloud in their presence. She was very considerate towards servants. She maintained an account of household expenses. She helped her husband to increase his income (From this statement it is not clear whether the women took up regular jobs to supplement the income of their husbands, or did some part-time work in their vacant hours which brought in additional income to their household). It is further stated that a woman was not better than a dead woman if she could not win the love of her husband. It is, therefore, evident that after all women had several limitations and did not enjoy an equal position with men.

From other accounts we know that the women enjoyed legal protection and if they were good house-wives, they were very much respected. According to Narada if a man deserted a wife who was obedient, sweet-tempered, skilful, virtuous and mother of a male issue, the king inflicted severe punishment on him. In case a 'perfect' maiden was married to a man, who had an unknown defect before marriage, she could not only leave her husband and re-marry but she was enjoined upon to do so by her relations.

The maidens belonging to high families and girls who had taken up the life of a hermit, were highly educated even to the extent of being able to compose verses. Besides the educational institutions there were regular institutions for dancing, music and other extra-curricular activities. There were also women instructors and teachers.

The Puranas, which are presumed to be the product of the Gupta Age, attach much importance to women. In Markandeya Purana it is advised that wife should be protected even if not of a good temperament as she was an important

part of life. She is stated to be a source of righteousness, wealth and love among men. The husband who forsook his wife was considered to have abandoned righteousness. Padma Purana contains a story of a man who did not take along his devoted wife to the places of pilgrimage. The result was that his visit to the holy places bore no fruit.

The woman was respected, and as creator of humanity, she was known as Shakti. Manu writes that where women are respected, the gods rejoice: Where they are not, every action is useless. Dr. B.G. Gokhale holds a similar view. He writes that the greatest importance attached to a woman was in her role of a mother. She held a place of great honour and was obeyed implicitly. A daughter was regarded with tenderness but a mother was esteemed as the symbol of humanity and even of Divinity. She was respected more than the father. Without them no religious ceremony was complete.

Widow re-marriage was not looked upon with favour but we come across several instances of this type of marriage. There are several cases of Sati among women of high families, references about which are available in the works of Kalidasa and other contemporary writers. One of the chief causes of the growing popularity of Sati during the Gupta period was presumably the anxiety to maintain the purity of races which was endangered by the inter-mingling of the foreigners, consequent on the foreign invasions and the establishment of foreign rule in India before the rise of the Guptas. Dandin, a contemporary writer says that a respectable woman was supposed to perish on the pyre of her husband even if he was a scoundrel. Kalidasa also writes that the widows were excluded at the marriage occasions. There were, however, some restrictions to the performance of Sati ceremony. A pregnant woman could not die with her husband. We come across a reference in the Mandasore Stone Inscription, about a person Bandhuverman, which indirectly tells us that there were several women who did not perish on the pyre of their husbands and continued to live as widows.

During the Gupta Age women were healthy, beautiful and of a high character. The people had aesthetic sense and understood the connotation of the term 'beauty'. In Meghaduta, Kalidasa has described the beauty of a woman as being slim, youthful, with pointed teeth, and lips like the ripe *bimba* fruit, slender-waisted, eyes resembling those of a frightened fawn, possessing a deep navel, having a languid gait due to heavy hips, with her body slightly bent by her breasts. (C. Narasimha Sastri's Ancient Indian Life in Kalidasa).

During this period the lot of women was better as compared with that of the women of the ancient days. A reference in Rigveda indicates that on the birth of a female child the members of the family used to become gloomy. While the birth of a male child used to be an occasion for great rejoicing. However, this was not the case during the Imperial Gupta period. People loved their daughters and gave them education like their sons. They considered their daughters as a kind of trust to be discharged by them, a precious jewel to remain with them till claimed by her husband. The parents found relief only when she was delivered to her rightful lord.

The girls had the freedom of movement and in some cases they even enjoyed the freedom of selecting their life partners. The life of a woman had three divisions. During the first stage she lived as a daughter. In the second stage she played the role of wife. In the third stage she became a mother. Her responsibilities were many. She was the mistress of the house and incharge of home affairs. Not only was she to be an adviser to her husband but she was also required to act as his companion. She has been described as a permanent companion of her husband in Dharma, Artha and Kama'.

From the Gupta inscriptions and coins we can assume that women were considered to be a very important element of the society. In some cases they gained so much ascendancy over their husbands that they shared their responsibilities with them. In the coins of the first Gupta ruler he is

represented as presenting a ring to his queen Kumara Devi. Samudra Gupta has also been shown with his queen Datta Devi in his Ashvamedha coins. Queen Dhruva Devi played a very important role to make the career of Chandra Gupta II. Kumara Devi was not only honoured by her husband but was also adored by her son who felt proud of calling himself a son of Chandra Gupta I from Kumara Devi. After gaining a victory over his enemy Skanda Gupta hurried to his mother to convey to her the good news of his success over his enemies.

From what is described above it can be concluded that during the Gupta period good women enjoyed a very honourable and respectable position. Kalidasa, Dandin and other contemporary historians have paid glowing tributes to them.

However, there were certain limitations. A woman without a child did not enjoy any respect in the Gupta society. She did not have any claim on the property of her husband and had to remain contented with a maintenance allowance. A woman could not contract a second marriage in normal circumstances. She had to live or die with her husband. If she did not perform Sati ceremony on the death of her husband and wanted to stay on as a widow, she had to live under many trying circumstances. Preferably, she had to stay as an ascetic in hermitage under the charge of some distinguished sage. She was required to practice all those austerity measures, which were normally meant for the persons in the third and the fourth stages of life. Women could not be forced to commit Sati. However, they were coerced through examples and arguments.

Slavery

The institution of slavery can be traced as far back as the Vedic Age. The Dravidians have been referred to in the earlier records as 'Dasas' or slaves. Normally, in a struggle between the two tribes, the captured members of the defeated group used to be kept as slaves by the victors. The slave system was also prevalent during the Imperial Gupta period as is evident from the Allahabad Pillar Ins-

cription, wherein Harisena has mentioned himself as a 'Dasa' (slave) of Samudra Gupta.

The slave system of the Imperial Gupta period, however, was free from all those atrocities and cruelties for which the slave system of the West became notorious all over the world. The slaves in India were not accorded inhuman treatment. In fact, the slave system was maintained to distinguish men of higher birth, character and learning from the low-born and such other degraded people.

The slaves in India were of the following types during this period:

(1) All such persons as could not get a square meal a day owing to the failure of crops and famine conditions and in sheer helplessness were compelled to sell themselves for a particular amount of money to a rich man as slaves.

(2) All such people as due to their extravagances or unemployment were heavily under debt and being unable to repay the loan had no option but to sell their persons degrading themselves as slaves.

(3) All such gamblers as lost the game and with that also their liberty.

These three types of slaves, however, were not "life-long" slaves. They could regain their liberty after the repayment of the debt which had dragged them into slavery.

There was another type of slaves who had been defeated and taken prisoners. These people were not given the same concessions as the above three classes. However, they could also be manumitted if they provided a substitute for themselves to their master or at any occasion saved the life of their master. In the second case, a slave even became entitled to a share of the property of his master equal to that of his son. A female slave could gain her freedom by bearing a child to her master.

From the above it is clear that the treatment accorded to a slave in India was much better than that accorded to his counterpart in the West, who was treated not better than a beast.

The ceremony of manumission was celebrated in a symbolic manner. The slave carried a jar on his shoulder and approached his master. The latter took away the jar from his shoulder and smashed it on the ground. The carrying of jar on the shoulder depicted slavery and its smashing by the master indicated the emancipation of the slave who carried it. The master then sprinkled sacred water on the head of the slave. This water contained grams and flowers. After this ceremony, in the presence of a gathering the master thrice declared the freedom of his slave, who thus became a free man.

There prevailed perfect harmony between a master and his slave, and the latter did not resent his enslavement very much as he could at any time seek his manumission provided he was in a position to fulfil any of the conditions stated above.

General Life of People

From the contemporary accounts of Kalidasa, Fahien and Dandin we know that people during the Imperial Gupta Age led a very advanced, cultured and settled life. From the paintings of Ajanta and the works of art at Mathura, Benaras and Pataliputra we find confirmation of this fact.

From the ruins of ancient cities which have been excavated it is evident that the people used to live in pucca houses which were well-furnished with all the modern amenities of life. Every house-holder maintained furniture, utensils, jewellery, ornaments and other day-to-day necessities according to his capacity.

Dandin tells us that like the early Vedic Aryans the people used to keep pets like cats, dogs, parrots, *mainas*, etc. We are also told that people were fond of gambling, charriot-races, cock-fighting, hunting, dancing and other such pastimes. Generally gambling is considered to be an unwholesome pastime and is unanimously condemned in all literature. Its support by Dandin, therefore, makes an interesting reading. His defence of this game is a unique departure from the routine.

According to him gambling develops a feeling of magnanimity in a person, because he is required to drop a pile of money like straw. The alternations of winning and losing create a psychological firmness in the mind and saves him from becoming a victim of joy or despondency. It generates impetuosity, the basis of all manliness. It trains the person in developing a quick intelligence in detecting tricks with dice and sleight of hand, Demanding exclusive attention, it gives superb training in mental concentration. It creates a delight in audacity, which follows brisk resolution and the ability to hold one's own while dealing with the toughest customers. It is useful for the cultivation of self-reliance.[1]

Dandin has also praised hunting as beneficial for health as it gives magnificent exercise to the legs and long-winded speed might come very useful after a defeat. It dries up the phlegmatic humour, thus promoting digestion. By reducing fat, it makes the body vigorous, sinewy and agile. It provides stamina to brave cold, heat, wind, rain, hunger and thirst.[2]

A cock-fight attracted a large and enthusiastic gathering of people. Cocks, which had specific names and were armed with knives or blades, were placed in their pens. When the fight began, the people must have crowded all round as they do even now, to watch one armed cock set against another by their owners. Before the actual fight there must have been betting. Exactly similar cockfights take place even today in Tuluva (modern South Kanara). Cockfights were associated with brawls, especially in the market-place.[3]

Kalidasa also makes a mention of these outdoor pasttimes. He writes in Raghuvamsa that while hunting was popular with the nobles and kings, common people were fond of ram-fights. Wine and theatre were very popular with the people and they had developed tastes like the Grecians. They were also very fond of music. The women were fond of bathing in public tanks and producing a sound like that of a tomtom by beating water with their hands.

1, 2 & 3—Arthur W. Ryder's 'The Ten Prince'.

The people delighted themselves by sprinkling coloured water on each other as is done even now-a-days on Holi. Boys and girls played with balls. 'Jhoola' (swing) was also a very popular amusement with young girls. We are told that the rich people of the Imperial Gupta Age had arranged for the joy-swings in the enclosed gardens of their palaces. The people were also fond of story-telling. Contemporary records tell us about gathering of villagers around an elder member of the society to listen to some interesting stories.

The people were also very fond of celebrating festivals like Dipavali, Dussehra, Baisakhi, Holi, etc. The kings themselves were very much interested in the celebration of such occasions and festivals.

Food and Drinks

Unlike the early Vedic Aryans the people of the Imperial Gupta Age had developed varied tastes in the matter of their food and drinks. Although the food of a common man in a village remained simple and consisted of wheat, barley, rice, sugar, ghee and milk, the people in the cities, especially the rich, had introduced several delicacies prepared out of these basic food stuffs. Kalidasa tells us that the rice of several kinds like sali, kalama and nivara was known to these people. They also knew several preparations of sweet-meats, milk, butter, curd and ghee. They used spices in the preparation of their meals. Several fruits like mango, tamarind, apple, cocoanut, pears, plums, peaches, apricots, grapes, oranges and pomegranates were in daily use by the rich people.

The people seemed to be fond of meat. From the evidence of Fahien we know that it was not popular with the high-born. The meat-sellers had separate residential quarters outside the city. Dandin and Kalidasa have mentioned different varieties of meat used by the people. Dandin has even justified hunting. Kalidasa makes a mention of regular slaughters-houses from where the meat of different animals was brought to the market place for sale. People also ate fish, chickens and several type of birds. Fahien

saw everything through Buddhist glasses. But as Buddhism was fast declining, his statement cannot be accepted as a general view of the Indian people towards non-vegetarian diet.

The people were very fond of drinking. While the Vedic Aryans had only two favourite drinks, namely soma and sura, the Imperial Gupta people knew many types of drinks. Both men and women used to drink. It was considered that intoxicating drinks lent a special charm to women. Kalidasa, Dandin and Visakhadata give us several instances of drinking-bouts. In 'Malavikagnimitram' we come across a reference to Queen Iravati in an intoxicated state. Similarly, in 'Kumara Sambhava' we get a reference to drinking by Siva and Parvati. Indumati drank through the lips of Aja, her husband, who after a sip transferred it to the mouth of Indumati.

The paintings of Ajanta caves tell us that the kings and the queens preferred to drink from jugs rather than from cups. It was patronised by everyone.

A few references in the pillar inscriptions and cave inscriptions also confirm the assumption that drinking was very popular with the rich and the poor both. Dandin thus justifies drinking, "This fortifies the charm of youth through the steady use of spirituous antidotes to numerous diseases. It neutralizes all misfortunes by increasing self-esteem. It kindles sexual desire and improves the capacity for pleasure. It drowns the consciousness of sin." (p. 161 Vishruta's Adventure).

We also know from the contemporary records that liquor was controlled by the laws and could be sold only by the lawful sellers. Only men of repute were given the licence for its sale. They were required to charge a fixed price and maintain separate rooms, beddings and other amenities for people who stayed after drinking. These rooms were tastefully decorated with flowers. Several types of perfumed oils, scents and other comforts were arranged for the drinking parties. The wine-seller was also responsible for the belongings and the cash of the drunken people. Mer-

chants and rich people could be seen along with their charming mistress in these special rooms of the wine-shop in an intoxicated state with their eyes half-open. The wine merchant was expected to keep a strict watch over his customers. It was at these places that the government succeeded in catching many culprits through the wine merchants. They were, therefore, expected to be very vigilant and men of repute. The wine was a weakness not only with the subjects but the royalty also were accustomed to it. It was a fashionable vice of the time. The charm, which it lent to a lady, making her prettier, has been described vividly by Kalidasa in 'Malavikagnimitram'. He says that real beauty in the after effects of drunkenness may be seen in the red rolling eyes and in the meaningless expressions at every faltering step.

Fahien is far from truth when he writes that there were no dealers in intoxicating drinks. Epigraphic and historical records make it amply clear that while poor people drowned their sorrow in a cup of wine, the rich people used it as an addition to their other luxuries.

MARRIAGES

Marriage was considered as very sacred and it was compulsory for every Hindu to marry. As no religious ceremony was considered to be complete without the participation of the wife, marriage was a rule rather than an exception. Grihastha Ashrama, therefore, was given supreme importance. We come across several references which show that a Grihasthi was the pivot of all the social activities of the time and was respected and honoured by the people in other three stages of life. However, there were people, who, on account of their religious inclination, preferred a life of renunciation and did not marry at all. They stayed outside the cities and devoted themselves either to the worship of the Almighty or the study of scriptures. Another category of people who did not marry were sages or hermits. Dr. Prasanna Kumar Acharya has given a detailed account of the different types of marriages which

were in vogue during the Hindu period. He has defined marriage as a legal tie which enables the sexes to unite instinctively.

During the Gupta period marriage system was well regulated. There were several well-defined rules which governed the institution of marriage. These were, however, influenced to a great extent by the caste system, which had struck deep roots in the Hindu society. The practice of exogamy was universal. According to the lawgivers of the time, marriage was to be contracted between the parents of the boy and the girl within their caste. No marriage, however, could take place between persons of same sub-caste or near relatives.

The performance of marriage ceremony which had the approval of the parents—preferably the one arranged by them—was very interesting. The bridegroom was received by the parents and relatives of the girl and the ceremony of Kanyadan took place. Both the bridegroom and the bride were taken thrice around the sacrificial fire and were expected to make sixteen promises of mutual love, sincerity and life-long partnership. The last mantra chanted by both of them together was thus: "Be thou now my lifemate as we walk up seven steps together. Thus do thou go together with me forever and forever". The marriage consummated after all such ceremonies and rituals was considered to be a symbol of an indissoluble union.

There were, according to Dr. Acharya, eight types of marriages, known to the people of the Gupta Age :

(*i*) Brahma marriage;
(*ii*) Daiva or Divine form of marriage;
(*iii*) Arsha or Sagely form of marriage;
(*iv*) Manusha marriage.
(*v*) Asura marriage;
(*vi*) Gandharva or Romantic marriage;
(*vii*) Rakshasa or heroic type of marriage.
(*viii*) Paisacha or Devilish form of marriage.

(i) *Brahma Marriage :* This was a type of marriage wherein the parents married their daughter to a learned man. The chief object of such a marriage was to make the girl conversant with the qualities of her husband so that she may also cultivate them. The idea was that the children born of their marriage should have good learning and earn name in the society and enhance the prestige of their parents. In this type of marriage the parents of the girl invited the bridegroom to their residence and after all the ceremonies were over, saw him off with their daughter and provided a suitable dowry.

For an illustration of this type of marriage the union between Siva and Parvati may be quoted. This marriage was arranged and celebrated according to the Vedic rites. Kalidasa has praised this marriage very much. He writes that Parvati had to make many sacrifices for the love of Siva. She had to strive very hard and to undergo several privations for her love which had the approval of her parents. She loved Siva from her heart and her love was pure and devoid of all passions and worldly pleasures. Prof. A.B. Keith has described the wedlock of Siva and Parvati "an ideal of human marriage and human love."

(ii) *Daiva or Divine form of Marriage :* This was the marriage of a girl to a learned priest. Parents who could arrange such a match for their daughter were considered to be very lucky. A priest in the society of those times was considered as the most promising man. The girl was presented to the priest with all the religious rites and ceremonies. She was decorated with ornaments and was richly dressed. Sacrifices were offered on this occasion. This marriage raised the standard of the girl as well as the status of her parents in the society. It provided an intellectual company to the girl. A priest might not be a very rich person, but he commanded respect and had a place in the society at par with the aristocracy. In such a marriage the parents were not bothered about the future of their daughter as her husband enjoyed an enviable position. For an illustration we may quote the marriage of Indra and Indrani.

(iii) *Arsha or Sagely form of Marriage:* This was a marriage in which the bridegroom was a sage. The chief object of this marriage was to ensure children with high intellectual faculties.

Normally a sage did not marry and there are several instances in the history where sages preferred a life of aloofness and resided outside the city. They devoted themselves to the worship of the Almighty. They served as models for ideal character and discipline for the Indian society. However, there were cases when a sage expressed his desire to go in for a marriage. Fahien gives us an interesting story of the hunch-backed maidens of Kanauj. He writes that a sage asked the king of Kanauj for the hand of one of his daughters. When the king conveyed this desire of the sage to his daughters, with the exception of the youngest, all of them refused. When the sage came to know of their refusal he was enraged and cursed the princesses, who became hunch-backed maidens.

Parents who could get a sage for their daughter thought themselves to be very fortunate. The bridegroom was received by the parents of the bride and marriage was performed according to the Vedic rites. The only fear was that the sage might again take to his life of renunciation. As a measure of security or an undertaking, the parents of the girl wanted from the sage a cow or a bull. The marriage of sage Agastya to Lopamudra was one of this type.

(iv) *Manusha Marriage:* It was also known as Prajapatya marriage. In this type of marriage both the husband and the wife enjoyed equal rights in Dharma, Artha and Kama. The chief object underlying this marriage was to get children, who could perform the last ceremonies and rites of their parents. These children were also expected to keep their parents' honour intact even after the latter's death.

Both the wife and the husband had a specific programme of their duties, which they had to perform as Grihasthis. After their marriage the husband and the wife had to perform all those duties which were obligatory on every house-

holder. They fed their dependants, offered oblations to the manes, entertained their guests and all other needy persons who might come to their door. They were expected to be social and perform all such customs as were expected of a house-holder. This was a normal type of marriage and perhaps the most popular of all the types in vogue in that period.

The four types of marriages cited above were given top priority and the parents of the girl who could get their daughters married in one of these ways were considered to be very fortunate. Manu writes that the son born as a result of the first form of marriage liberates from sins ten ancestors, ten descendants, and himself as the twenty-first; the son of the second form saves seven ancestors and seven descendants; the son of the third form three in the ascending and three in the descending lineage; and the son of the fourth form six in either line....The children begotten of these marriages would possess beauty, goodness, wealth and fame, and, being most righteous, they would live a hundred years. (Glories of India on Indian Culture and civilization).

The last four types of marriages were permitted not because of the sanction of the society or the law, but due to the weakness of the law and the society and for the special circumstances which were responsible for these.

They were not looked upon with respect or favour, and all the respectable people condemned them. Still the society had no alternative but to accept them as legal marriages because a ban on these would have created further complications which, perhaps, would be difficult to face.

(v) *Asura or Undivine*: The fifth type was known as Asura or undivine. It was so called as it was against the law of the land and against all Vedic rites and principles of religion and society. In such a marriage the bride was virtually sold to the bridegroom for a certain sum of money. Parents of the girl received the money and placed their daughter at the disposal of the bridegroom. In some cases even the bride accepted some money from the bridegroom before she agreed to stay with him in his domestic life. As an illustration of this type of marriage we may quote the

case of Pandu and Madri of Mahabharata. However, we do not come across any prominent illustration of this type of marriage in the Imperial Gupta records.

(vi) *Gandharva or Romantic Marriage :* This may be called as a love-marriage which is becoming quite popular in the modern times. It was a type of marriage which was not arranged by the parents of either the bridegroom or the bride. The bridegroom and the bride developed relations without the knowledge of their parents. The latter came to know of the affair only at a time when the relations had already developed to such an extent that it was not easy to break them down. This type of marriage was not liked or appreciated by the society as it was a marriage without its sanction. It was, however, tolerated, as its non-recognition would have led not only to the sexual promiscuity but also disturbed the social equilibrium, thus creating problems which even the society of today is unable to solve.

In such marriages the parents were not consulted and there was, therefore, no question of observance of rites, customs and ceremonies which were considered essential for the celebration of a marriage. Such marriages, we are told by Kalidasa, did not last for a long time. There were mutual quarrels and in majority of cases there was a divorce. We may quote, as an example, the case of Shakuntala and the king Dushyant. Kalidasa has given a very detailed account of the whole affair and the story is too well known to be repeated here. The object of this story was to prove that love marriages based upon a short-lived fancy, in spite of their success in the early stages, brought miseries upon the two lovers and resulted in social complications. Kalidasa says that the romantic love, where the two parties develop their relations without the knowledge of their elders and relatives, is bound to fail afterwards.

(vii) *Rakshasa or Heroic form of Marriage :* This was another form of marriage which was not approved by the society but which was acknowledged by the law. In such cases the bride was forcibly taken away from her home by the

bridegroom. The parents of the bride resisted and in many cases were killed in their attempt to defend their honour from the invader. If the bridegroom was strong enough to overcome all the obstructions and took away the bride to his residence the marriage was recognised as a legal one. There are many interesting instances of this type of marriage in history. Arjuna married Subhadra in this manner. Similarly, Lord Krishna abducted Rukmani. The first is an interesting story. When Lord Krishna came to know of the love between his sister Subhadra and Arjuna he kept his brother Balram out of the way and indirectly allowed Arjuna to escape with Subhadra. Although such marriages in their outward appearance may not appeal generally but it seems that these were successful. In such cases the brides did love the bridegroom but the parents of the bride did not like the idea of marriage of their daughter to the bridegroom. Thus the bridegroom in desperation had no other alternative but to use physical force and abduct his sweet-heart. In some cases it ruined the parents of the girl or of the bridegroom.

(viii) *Paisacha or Devilish form of Marriage ;* This was perhaps the most condemned type of marriage. It is surprising to note that such a marriage was allowed during the Gupta period. In such cases even the bride did not approve of her marriage with the bridegroom but she was forced to marry in order to maintain the purity of the society. In such cases the girls, when in an intoxicated state, or in an unbalanced mental condition or asleep, were molested. When the fact was made known to the society and to the law-givers of the land, instead of giving a severe punishment to the man, they only arranged his marriage with the girl, whom he had molested. For an illustration we can quote the case of Usha and Pradyumna.

There was another type of marriage known as Svayamvara marriage. This was prevalent mostly amongst the Kshatriyas. During the Gupta period some restrictions were, however, imposed on this type of marriage. The parents of the girl put forward some conditions and declared

that whosoever would fulfil these could marry their daughter. The eligibility of the suitor was, however, to be determined by the parents of the girl who invited only such people as were to their liking or belonged to their status. Kalidasa has drawn a very vivid picture of this type of marriage :

"Resembling the flame of a big, mobile torch the choosing maiden moved forward, and as she passed on, leaving the rejected kings behind her, they turned pale and sad. Their appearance became like the dark buttress of a palace on the royal highway when the light had passed beyond it. Then, at last, she stopped in front of one whom she liked and considered befitting her status in family, beauty and youth, and who was endowed with excellent virtues, particularly with worthy humility, to choose him.

With modesty, worthy of a woman, she placed the long 'garland of choice' round the neck of the youngman. Thus ended the Svayamvara amidst the resounding cheers of the citizens, who gave vent to their feelings of joy through a unanimous utterance, unpleasant to the ears of the disappointed kings". (India in Kalidasa)

All this display and show of the Svayamvara ceremony was entered into, really, to get an indirect approval of the society. The marriage of Rama with Sita and Arjuna with Dropadi were solemnised after the successful completion of the conditions laid down for the Svayamvara ceremony.

The Military feats or such other conditions, however, were now becoming things of the past. During the Imperial Gupta period a few suitable candidates were invited and the girl was asked to make her selection out of them. This ceremony was meant only for the rich people or nobility, as their daughters could attract candidates to claim their hands. This was not the case with the daughter of a poor man. We do not come across any such cases, as we do get in the ancient history, of an open bid being given for the daughters of the poor people and they being sold to the highest bidder in the market.

Both the bride and the bridegroom were expected to take some oaths at the time of the marriage in the presence

of Agni and the selected gathering which had come to participate in the marriage. The bridegroom was expected to take an oath for the protection of the bride, to forgive her shortcomings as far as possible and also to appreciate her merits. Puranas also give a similar account. We are told that a wife should be maintained and her draw-backs ignored even if she was not of a good temper. Similarly, the bride was required to be loyal to her husband and had to take an oath to this effect.

In Raghuvamsa we are told that the birth of a daughter was not an occasion of as much rejoicing as in the case of a son. However, girls were brought up with all care and their birth was not an occasion of mourning as it used to be during the later Vedic Age. Raghuvamsa, however, at another place tells us that in the so-called social order of the time, girls were considered to be the means of assuaging the sexual passions of men. Generally they were respected as the progenitors of human race.

Higher castes were given special concessions in respect of marriage. A Brahmana could have three wives, a Kshatriya two and a Vaishya only one. Inter-caste marriages were not prohibited and received the legal sanction. However, marriages between persons having common ancestors were prohibited. It was probably because of the reason that children born out of such marriages were weak both physically and intellectually. Normally, marriages were arranged, rather preferred, amongst people of a common occupation. Such people had equal economic status and in majority of cases shared a common faith and belief. It was easier for them to carry on life harmoniously. Inter-caste marriages were also known during this period. 'Pratiloma' confirms our presumption about such marriages.

After marriage there were several obligatory rites to be performed by every Hindu. There were different stages which a man had to pass in his married life. Manu tells us that it was obligatory for a bridegroom to make a sacrifice when he wanted to cohabit with his wife to have a child. After marriage an udumbara staff was kept in the nuptial bed to avoid contact between wife and husband. In

case they wanted to remove it and have a physical contact, they were required to perform another sacrifice. Another ceremony, known as 'Garbhadana', announced the conception of bride. Immediately after conception there was another ceremony known as 'Simantonnayana'. This signified the formal mother-hood of the bride. 'Pumsavana' ceremony was intended to regulate the sex of the child. From it we get the impression that people during Gupta age were scientifically well advanced people. This ceremony was performed during the third or the fourth month of the conception and it is claimed that the parents could have the sex of the child according to their liking after the ceremony.

The first religious ceremony required to be performed by the parents after the birth of the child was 'Jatakarman'. The chief object of this ceremony was to ensure that the child should lead a long life, enjoy a high moral character and good health. The next ceremony to be performed was 'Namasanskar' when the child was given a name and the sacrifices were made in accordance with the law and the capacity of the parents. Next ceremony was known as 'Anna Prasana' when the child was given solid food for the first time. The ceremony of 'Chaulakarana' was performed when the hair of the child were to be cut for the first time. It is now known as 'Mundan sanskar'. All the relatives and friends were invited and entertained. The ceremony of Upanayana was performed at the time when the child was sent to the school. The child was handed over to the teacher and he took an oath that he would take particular care of his studies and try to learn all sciences of the time. This pledge was known as 'Vedavaratas'. The last ceremony for a child was known as 'Samavartana' when he was discharged by his teacher on the completion of his studies. He returned home to settle down in life as a Grihasthi and was expected to perform all the ceremonies of a house-holder.

PART IV

Gupta Administration

GUPTA ADMINISTRATION

Kingship

Council of Ministers

People's Assemblies

Machinery of Government

Judicial Administration

Revenue Administration

Provincial Administration

Military Administration

GUPTA ADMINISTRATION

The Gupta period is known as a glorious period in the Indian history. It gave to India a long spell of peace and prosperity. Their Government was based on benevolent principles and the ruler considered it his duty to ensure the welfare of the people. He always took people in his confidence. Although he enjoyed undisputed powers, he never took a step which was not acceptable to the elders and was not in the interests of the country. The Guptas aimed at establishing a national government—an object which they achieved only after a protracted struggle against various enemies. They were determined to restore the ancient culture and civilization for which India had earned a name all over the world from time immemorial.

From the works of Kalidasa we come to know that Sanskrit was the national language. The state religion was Hinduism and the worship of Vishnu and Siva found favour with rulers and the majority of the people. Buddhism and Jainism were steadily declining. There was revival of Brahmanism. Under the Guptas people enjoyed freedom and security which they had longed for since the fall of the Mauryas and the establishment of foreign rule in the country. The Guptas patronised the old institutions of caste economy under which everyone was expected to take up the occupation of his ancestors. This not only resulted in the attainment of perfection in particular fields by individuals but also prevented unemployment from becoming a problem. The Government nationalised all the industries. A network of guilds and small organisations of the merchants flourished all over the country. The idea underlying this move was to avoid unhealthy competition in different trades as well as to safeguard the interests of the different groups of society.

Through his writings, Kalidasa gives us the impression that the emperors enjoyed undisputed sovereignty during the Gupta period. Their powers were unquestionable. The doctrine of the Divine Right of Kings was universally

accepted. Every instruction and delegation of power emanated from the king. Although the ministers were the heads of different departments of the State, they ruled in the name of the king who was the commander-in-chief in the war and the head of the state and its different departments during peace time.

Some of the writers, however, have tried to prove that the Gupta administration was a democratic set-up. The Guptas attached importance to the voice of the people, and always kept their interests in view. They have further tried to prove that the Guptas were merely the guardians of a government which was guided by Dharmashastras. However, a critical study reveals that truth lies somewhere midway between the two postulates. The Guptas were benevolent despots. Although they always took the counsel of the ministers and the elders and acted on their advice in majority of cases, they retained the power of veto and nobody could challenge their authority even if they chose to turn down the suggestion or advice offered to them by the counsellors or the elders. They were intelligent and far-sighted and rarely turned down any good advice though there was nobody to stand in their way.

Like the Mauryas the Guptas established a government in which the material welfare of the people was always kept in view. They had nothing new in their administration despite the changed designations of the officers appointed by them in the different departments of the state. They usually kept in view the welfare of the populace and tried to come up to their expectations in moral, social and economic fields.

KINGSHIP

From the Dharamashastras we know that a king was expected to have three qualities. He was required to be a good military organiser, an able administrator and a disciplinarian. However, it was not obligatory on every king to possess all the three of these qualifications. The importance of a king has been stressed by Yajnavalkya. He

has stated that a kingdom consisted of seven limbs, viz., the sovereign, the minister, the treasury, the fort, the state, the army and the allies. Of these seven the sovereign was the most important. He has been compared with the head, the minister with the eye, the treasury with the mouth, the army with the mind, the fort with the arm, the allies with the ear and the state with the legs. According to Kamandakaniti their joint efforts contributed to the structure of state and the betterment and progress of the government. Loss of any one of these might render the whole machinery incomplete

Kingship, according to Kalidasa, was not only hereditary but was also considered to be divine. The kings believed that kingship had been bestowed upon them by the Almighty and there was nobody to challenge them. This can also be proved from the fact that the Gupta kings took up high-sounding titles like "Indra" etc. The king had the say in the selection of his successor which confirms the hereditary rights of the Gupta kings. We have on record the selection of Samudra Gupta by Chandra Gupta I and that of Chandra Gupta II by Samudra Gupta. However, from the Allahabad Pillar Inscription and the Mathura Stone Pillar Inscription it is evident that although a king had the right to select his successor, he had the obligation to take the approval of his council and the people. The council and the people could, if they so liked, turn down the selection of his successor by the king. Chandra Gupta II was selected as successor by Samudra Gupta but the records tell us that the immediate successor of Samudra Gupta was Rama Gupta and not Chandra Gupta II. Perhaps the people did not like the selection made by the king. Another thing which becomes clear from the Gupta records is that the succession was not always in favour of the eldest son. This might have led to wars of succession as there were no hard and fast principles regulating the succession. According to some historians the claim of Samudra Gupta was challenged by Kacha. There was also a civil war immediately after the death of Kumara Gupta I among his sons, and Skanda Gupta, the fittest among his children, set aside

his elder brother Puru Gupta's claim. Kalidasa tells us in 'Raghuvamsa' that even the unborn king, still in the womb of the mother, had the same right to kingship as the born child. The mother of the unborn child could rule in the name of her child.

The kingship was a divine gift directly bestowed by the Almighty. According to a passage in 'Raghuvamsa' Indra sent rain; Yama checked the spread of diseases; Varuna made rivers safe for the mariners and Kubera increased the treasury of the king. The divinity of kingship is also confirmed by the high-sounding titles like Ishwara, Prajeswara, Deva, Bhoomipati etc., adopted by the Gupta kings.

There are divergent views about the position of the king. While some of the contemporary records have tried to prove that kingship was bestowed not by birth but by merit, there are others who support a blind faith in the king. However, both the schools of thought have condemned a king who did not adopt fair means and tried to rule the country tyrannically. Yajnavalkya condemns the king who adds to his treasury by unfair levies. Such a king would lead his people to destruction. At another place he advises that the king should choose his ministers from persons who are able, high-born, from hereditary families, sincere and true. With their help and that of the Brahmanas the ruler is advised to conduct the affairs of the state. Narada also expresses his feelings in similar words when he links the prosperity of people with the religious merit and the prosperity of a king. When the people lose their prosperity, the king is sure to be shorn of his merit and treasure.

From what has been stated above it becomes evident that a king was respected not because of his kingship but for his qualities. At another place it is stated that a king should exercise restraint. He should be generous, well-read and a man of determined spirit. He should avoid, as far as possible, gambling, drinking, hunting and other vices. He should treat his people like his own children. He should always be ready to listen to their genuine grievances.

At another place it is stated that as all that is good and bad emanates from the king, he should always possess very high qualities. In fact, there was a contract between the king and the people. They obeyed him because he protected them and looked after them. They and the kingdom were like a trust in his charge. The taxes which he collected from the people were, in reality, the remuneration for the services which he rendered to the people. The Gupta kings faithfully followed the grand principles enunciated by Kautilya in his 'Arthashastra' which laid down that a king should consider only those things as good which were endorsed so by his subjects. A king who lacked these qualities and was a servant of his passions or was untruthful, was bound to have a miserable lot. It is stated that a king who quarrelled with his subjects and colleagues, was happy in the company of the lower class people, and did not care for the Dharmashastras, was bound to get the life of an animal after his death.

A king, according to these contemporary writers and law-givers, should attach great importance to justice. He should not show any partiality towards the members of his own family or class or people when they were found guilty. It was the moral duty of the king to go into the minutest details of the cases which were brought before him and to try his utmost to ascertain what was wrong and what was right before giving the final verdict. He should see that men of integrity and honourable disposition were appointed as judges, and that they were fully acquainted with the laws of the state. The king was also required to prescribe different punishments for different crimes. The punishment had to be in accordance with the gravity of the crime. In all cases of doubt it was the duty of the judges to be very considerate before giving final judgment. Mr. C.R. Narasimha Shastri has described administration as a burden. According to him the person who carries this load successfully does a great service. An ideal king, he says, should never be afraid of death, dangers and difficulties and should be able to act up to them. He should neither be isolated from nor sneer at the common people.

Narada, the great law-giver, advises the people to respect their ruler even if he did not possess all the requisite qualities. However, he has also stated that if the people did not consider the disqualifications of a king seriously and did not rise against him, a stage would come when anarchy and disorder would prevail and it would be difficult to restore peaceful conditions. He emphasises that the king was only an administrator of the law and not a lawmaker. If he did not pay due regard to the Dharmashastras and acted against the religious laws, there was a possibility of a conflict between the king and the people and would endanger the position of the king. The king had the power to issue ordinances and proclaim laws enunciated by the Dharmashastras, as laws of the state.

From the records of the Gupta period it is evident that the kings personally led their army in the battle-field. Samudra Gupta, Chandra Gupta II and Skanda Gupta were the eye-witnesses of several engagements which took place during their reigns. Presumably, those rulers could not devote great attention either to the internal affairs of the state or to their external policy and the work of these two departments had to be left in the hands of their council of ministers. This has led some writers to try to conclude that the real power was in the hands of the ministers and the king could not afford to ignore their suggestions or decisions. In majority of cases, therefore, he acted according to their decisions. Thus, a sort of a constitutional monarchy was prevalent during the Gupta period. We also know from the contemporary records that there was an assembly of the people, known as *sabha*, which represented public opinion. This assembly was often consulted by the rulers on important questions. We know from the Allahabad Pillar Inscription that Chandra Gupta I summoned this assembly to get its approval for Samudra Gupta as his successor.

Education and Training

From the works of the contemporary law-givers we know that it was obligatory for a king to have the knowledge

of Shastras and to be well-versed in the literary and social sciences of the time. The Allahabad Pillar Inscription tells us that Samudra Gupta was a past master in poetry. The great poets like Kashyapa, Tumburu and Narada stood no comparison with him. Kalidasa tells us that Chandra Gupta II Vikramaditya was known for the men of talent at his court which was the centre of all the important literary figures of the time. Similarly, from the coins of the later Gupta monarchs it becomes clear that the Gupta monarchs could appreciate the various artistic, social and educational problems of the time. They were themselves good scholars and at times contributed to the cultural activities.

Kamandaka says that a king who is not proficient in *dandaniti* is no better than a blind man. Side by side with the instruction in Dharmashastras, the king was given training so that he may not fall an easy prey to Kama. It was made obligatory for kings not to gamble, drink or fall into immoral company.

From a study of the Imperial Gupta monarchs it becomes clear that they had certain ideals in view when they took up the reigns of kingship and they exerted themselves to achieve these. They had sympathy for the down-trodden. They were always ready to make sacrifices in the cause of religion, honour and their people. Chandra Gupta II went to the extent of murdering his elder brother Rama Gupta when the latter agreed to the ignoble treaty of surrendering his wife to a hill chief after a defeat.

The Imperial Guptas were advised by their counsellors to avoid public gatherings and to adopt security measures whenever participating in the religious gatherings or social functions. In this respect they resembled the Maurya ruler, Chandra Gupta. The kings were advised to keep a watch on their harem and to maintain its purity with the help of honest officers. Kamandaka advises a king to avoid the company of people suffering from infectious diseases and to follow the instructions laid down by the sages.

DUTIES OF THE KING

From the contemporary religious records and law books it is evident that the heir-apparent was loaded with the duties even as a prince. He was required to assist the king in the discharge of civil and military responsibilities. Some of the princes took up heavy responsibilities and became as renowned as the reigning king himself. Skanda Gupta became so prominent during the days of Kumara Gupta I that some of the writers have gone to the extent of saying that the period of Kumara Gupta I was nothing but a long record of the achievements of Skanda Gupta. Samudra Gupta helped his father Chandra Gupta I and proved his military prowess to such an extent that Chandra Gupta I was obliged to name him his successor and abdicate in his favour. Chandra Gupta II also showed his mettle as a prince when Rama Gupta, after a defeat, had agreed to surrender his wife to a hill chief. We have several other instances where the king grew weak due to old age and was obliged to share his responsibilities in the military field and the civil departments with the princes. From a reference of the period of Kumara Gupta I it appears that he was the first of the Gupta rulers to offer the post of viceroy to a commoner. This indirectly helps us to conclude that up to this period all the responsible positions, particularly of the viceroys, were reserved for the royal princes.

In order to avoid a war of succession among his sons every Gupta emperor normally selected one of his sons as his heir-apparent with the approval of his council of ministers. A special ceremony was held when the prince selected as heir-apparent was given a distinctive position and was no more to be known as a Kumara and was called Yuvaraja. From this date onward he was a partner with the king in the matters of state.

As a king, the Gupta monarch was expected to prove that he had taken up the responsibilities of the government for the people and not for his personal interests. The Dharmashastras tell us that the king should enjoy only such comforts as were legitimate. The ruler was required to

avoid the four evils—woman, gambling, hunting and drink. He could, however, take up hunting as a pastime. The contemporary law books give an interesting and detailed list of amusements which could be pursued by a king. He could enjoy a good bath in a tank or could have the company of the family attendants and royal ladies when tired of the state work. During Holi, he threw coloured water on the ladies with a golden syringe who also exchanged throwing of coloured water with him with the beat of drums. The kings were also very fond of swinging and from the contemporary record we know that in the gardens of the royal palace there was arrangement for swings. The kings were fond of music and the coins and inscriptions inform us that Samudra Gupta and Kumara Gupta were past masters in this art. The Gupta rulers were also good horsemen and fond of sports. It is confirmed by the evidence of their coins.

However, these amusements were meant for the leisure hours and were not intended to interfere with their daily duties. The kings had many religious duties to perform and had to prove that they were ruling in accordance with the laws of the land. They were worshippers of Vishnu and Siva.

During normal times the king devoted a part of his day to the administration of justice and performance of other political and administrative duties. He was the custodian of the property of the state and the protector of his subjects. Protection of the people was possible only if the king was very vigilant and there was a strong army. The country, as is known from the account of Fahien, was in a flourishing condition. Crimes were rare and roads were safe. This goes to prove the interest evinced by the rulers in the welfare of their people and we can say that the Gupta rulers stood by the principles and the instructions contained in the sacred and law books. They were benevolent despots. They dealt sternly with law-breakers, and law-abiding citizens were always loved and respected by them. They never tried to force their opinions on their councils of ministers and paid heed to the genuine grievances of the people.

The inscriptions tell us about another important duty of the king. He was required to protect his people from famine, floods, fire and other calamities and to give all possible relief. From the inscription of Skanda Gupta, which gives a vivid account of the destruction wrought by the breaches in the Sudarsana Lake, we gather that the king and his council of ministers stood day and night by the side of the affected people to give them all possible help. They rested only when prosperity was restored to the region. Law books make it obligatory for a king to take all precautionary measures and to follow a well-planned policy to avert, as far as possible, these calamities. It is stated that whenever a calamity falls over the people, it is the moral duty of the king to take immediate steps to overcome the crisis.

From the study of the coins and inscriptions we know that the Gupta rulers took keen interest in the advancement of the different arts and education in the country. The arts of sculpture and painting, etc., never again reached the heights attained during the Gupta period. The country enjoyed a cultural progress never experienced before. The university of Nalanda which was patronised by the Gupta monarchs became an ideal place of education and students from all over the world flocked to it for instruction.

Channels of Authority

From the account of Kalidasa we know that the rulers moved about with great pomp and splendour. They were always accompanied by musicians and dancing girls. The cities which they visited were decorated majestically with flowers and buntings and people stood in reverence in rows on both sides of the road from where the king passed. They could not approach him and could only have a glimpse at him from a distance. He was accompanied by an Imperial bearer with the Imperial standard. Except the ministers, no commoner had an access to the king. There was thus a necessity of the use of some means of communication between the king and his subjects through which the king could make his subjects acquainted with his pleasure and displeasure,

with his orders and with his policy in regard to the administration. The first of these terms was *Auka*. It means an impression of a royal seal. The second was *Sasana*. It means an order of the king for the people or for his feudal subjects. It was by means of these orders that he ruled over his vast empire. He conveyed his orders to his viceroys. He confirmed feudal nobles in their respective areas through these orders. His instructions were issued in writing. It is described in the contemporary law books that the officers or the servants of the king were to go by his written orders. They could disregard a verbal order without any fear of being punished. It is further mentioned that a king or a royal officer, who worked without the written order or instructions, were thieves. The real authority did not lie in the kings but in their seal. It meant very much and was to be obeyed and respected. A challenge to the royal seal meant a rebellion which was punished with death.

Sasanka was the third means which meant the seal of the king utilised in the issue of an edict of the government. The fourth channel was *Namamudra* which means a seal wherein the name of the king who issued it was mentioned. The fifth was Ghoshana through which an order of the government was conveyed to the public.

The Guptas ruled over India for about 275 years. The type of government established by them has attracted the attention of many writers. It is very difficult to give a particular label to it. Of the period of Samudra Gupta we can say that it was a feudo-federal structure. From the Allahabad Pillar Inscription we come to know that Samudra Gupta did not annex all the conquered states into his empire but restored them to the rulers whom he had defeated in the battle-field. But for the nine states of the north he allowed the republican tribes and frontier states to enjoy internal autonomy after they had acknowledged his supremacy. Some historians hold the view that the Gupta empire was divided between the two sons of Kumara Gupta I after his death and two parallel governments were establishd over Northern India. There were no disturbances and the two governments flourished side by side in harmony like two

horses yoked together before a carriage. This type of government was known as Dvairajya.

The government can also be described as Samrajya. In this type of government the people and the feudal lords enjoyed internal autonomy. The government did not interfere in the affairs of the constituent states. The customs, which were in vogue before integration, remained undisturbed. The village panchayats were the deciding factor in all the cases of disputes. However, the authority of the government was to be renewed by the supreme lord, i.e. the Gupta emperor. This is proved from a description in the Allahabad Inscription wherein it is stated that the feudal lords visited the royal court to pay their homage and get instructions and the necessary authority for the enjoyment of their powers in their respective lands through the Gupta seal which bore the stamp of Garuda.

The last type of government which could be attributed to the Gupta set-up is Sarvabhauma. The Gupta emperor was considered as the sole authority and the real sovereign of the state. He was the most honoured in all the lands and exercised supreme authority. Some writers feel that the Gupta administration was a cross between Sarvabhauma and Samrajya. It seems to be nearer to the truth, as the king, although he was the supreme authority, always took his people in his confidence and never went against their wishes.

COUNCIL OF MINISTERS

The Gupta rulers were constitutional monarchs. They ruled over the country with the help of a council of ministers. The institution of councillors is very ancient in India. Perhaps in the whole of Hindu period there was no monarch who ruled without their assistance. The council was, however, known by different names. References about it are found in Arthashastra. It is also mentioned in the Buddhist and Jainist records. It was inseparable from royalty. However, composition of the council in the Gupta period differs from that of the Mauryas. While Kautilya in his Arthashastra advises the king to take the counsel of

three to four ministers, the Gupta records do not specify the composition of the king's council. The number of councillors perhaps depended on the king's convenience. The ministers were advised to refer to the decisions taken by their predecessors in different cases and take advantage of their wise counsels. The councillors were advised to take up the right line of action in the interests of the state. They were required to maintain complete secrecy in the matters of the state and not to discuss such matters in public. It has been stated that the king of Padmavati met his doom because he used to discuss the important secret matters of the state in the presence of a bird sarika who recited them loudly in public later. The councillors were advised to hold meetings of council at places which were inaccessible to the general public.

The importance of the council has been described in detail by Kalidasa and other contemporary writers. The ministers have been described as real administrators of the country. Whenever the king was away from his kingdom, the administration of the state was carried on by his ministers. It is confirmed by the records of the period of Samudra Gupta. When a king was weak, minor or luxurious, the responsibility of the ministers increased. In fact all the important projects and the decisions originated from the council of ministers.

The law-givers of the Gupta period attach great importance to the council. Dr. Jayaswal holds the view that the Gupta kings did not have the veto power. This is, however, not above dispute as we have several instances on record to prove that the kings had their own way in times of emergency. There are, however, instances when the kings sacrificed the most cherished desire if it was disapproved by their council. Chandra Gupta II was a favourite son of Samudra Gupta but presumably he could not succeed his father in spite of his selection by Samudra Gupta because the council of ministers did not wish him to be the successor. Sukraniti says that a king may be a past master in all the sciences and state-craft but he should never take up the sole responsibility of the state and reach important decisions without the

advice of his councillors. If he did not follow this line of action he was bound to land himself into trouble.

Qualifications of Councillors

From the contemporary records it appears that the ministers and the councillors belonged to a particular class of people. The king was advised to take his councillors preferably from amongst the progeny of the ministers. The appointment of the ministers was generally hereditary. The Guptas chose their ministers from hereditary families as is evident from the phrase, *Anvayapraptasachivya*, which occurs in an inscription of Chandra Gupta II. This was not, however, a hard and fast rule and merit used to be the real criterion for appointment to this post. The main object was to run the administrative machinery in the best possible manner. Thus, normally, the councillors used to be experts in the field of administration. It was indeed very difficult to select suitable men for the ministership. Qualifications were laid down for this purpose. Ordinarily they were to be from respectable families of friendly disposition. They should be learned, conversant in state-craft and clear-minded. They should be honest, independent, enthusiastic and firm in their attitude in the face of thorny and complicated problems. They should be handsome and possess a reserved temperament, and above all should be Indians.

Duties of the Council of Ministers

The council of ministers has been described as the basis of the existence of a king. He has been advised to work in consonance with his council as the security of the country depended upon its co-operation. Similarly, the members of the council are advised to maintain very strict secrecy about the deliberations of their meetings.

Writers differ about the working of the council. The Guptas did not have a small cabinet. It was an extended one and included experts on the various matters of the state. Its duty was to tender expert advice to the king. A full

meeting of the council was held when some important matter of policy was under consideration. The decision arrived at such a sitting was conveyed to the king through the chief minister. We get a reference to this practice in 'Malavikagnimitram', wherein the minister reports to the king that they had resolved how the affairs connected with Vidarbha should be settled and wished to know the king's opinion. This points out that the cabinet as a whole, and not members in their individual capacities, were responsible to the king. He could consult ministers individually but important matters were always considered by a full meeting of the cabinet. Sukraniti, however, tells us that the king should ask for the opinion of his ministers in their individual capacities in writing. Then he should compare their arguments with his own opinion and arrive at a decision which would thus be devoid of any undue bias. This would also enable the king to judge the capacity of each one of his ministers to think, argue and grasp. Manu, however, says that a king should consult his ministers individually as well as in the council and should arrive at a decision which he considers to be correct. Kautilya too holds a somewhat similar view. This is also endorsed by Kalidasa in his 'Malavikagnimitram', wherein the minister is pleased to inform the king that his views were in accordance with the decision already arrived at by the council. This lends support to the view that the ministers first obtained the views of their king on a particular matter of the state before disclosing to him their decision.

Several limitations were, however, imposed on the council of ministers while discussing a particular subject. They had to refrain from making personal remarks during discussion. They should not lose their tempers when opposed and had the liberty of expression. The decision was arrived at by the majority of votes. It is mentioned in the contemporary records that a king should not over-ride the decision of his cabinet, as the interests of the state would be adversely affected by such a decision.

However, if the king felt that the decision of the majority of the council was not very sound and the arguments

advanced by some members of the council, which were not accepted, were plausible, he could again call the meeting of his council to discuss the issue. However, in all those cases where a decision had been arrived at unanimously by his cabinet, it was in the interests of the state as well as the king himself, to endorse these views.

Some writers hold that the Gupta kings, unlike their predecessors, gave a despotic rule to the country. They were very strong kings and had captured the country by their strength. They were not bound to obey the voice of the people and it would be surprising to say that they agreed to surrender the prerogatives of the crown to the council of ministers. The Gupta monarchs might have maintained a large council of experts to advise them on the various matters of state. They, however, seemed to reserve to themselves the right of veto. In cases of emergency they decided as they thought it expedient. Some writers also hold that the council was not enlarged and it was of the same size as the council of the Mauryas. However, experts on various affairs were specially invited to attend the meetings whenever the king thought it proper. Some writers also hold that no significance was attached to the word of the majority in the deliberations of the council and a case was settled only when all the members of the cabinet were convinced that the decision was correct. Thus, there was to be a unanimity.

The ministers had many duties to perform. They had to look after a retiring king and enthrone his successor. They were the final authority during the period between the out-going king and the installation of the new ruler. They had to inform the people about-the day to day developments of the affairs during this period. They could, however, maintain strict secrecy about the death of a king in the interests of the state. When a king died without a heir, but his queen was pregnant, the ministers called a meeting of the commoners and took a decision to the transfer of the power to the expectant chief queen during the period of her conception. They were the custodians of law and order

in the country during this period. It was their duty to see that a qualified king was enthroned. Their voice carried much weight as is evident from the succession of Rama Gupta after Samudra Gupta. But for their opposition Samudra Gupta would have been succeeded by Chandra Gupta Vikramaditya. We come across a similar reference in the earlier part of the Allahabad Pillar Inscription, where Samudra Gupta is selected as a successor by Chandra Gupta I with the approval of his council. The ministers had a very responsible and tough job during the period of the transfer of power from one king to his successor. It is evident that the council of ministers was not only an advisory body to the king but it also exercised a very strong influence over the king and the body politic of the state and was really the governing authority. Although the king was the symbol of all power, he had to subordinate his will and views to his council of ministers several times and had to rule in accordance with the advice tendered by it.

People's Assemblies

The 'Sabha' and 'Samiti' were two important political organisations during the Vedic Age. When the Aryans settled down in the Gangetic plain and the tribal life started disappearing fast and small principalities sprouted over the whole of Northern India, the Sabha and Samiti started decaying. They lost their regional character and became only advisory bodies to the king. The situation, however, changed during the Gupta period. The Sabha seems to have enjoyed a good position. The kings pronounced, again and again, in their public speeches, that they wanted to rule Aryavarta and give it a unity and national character. They could not ignore the influence which the Sabha, as a political organisation and a popular assembly of the people, enjoyed in the body politic of the state. It consisted essentially of the representatives of the people. Presumably, it also included all such officials as had either retired or were serving on the various advisory councils. To what extent it exercised influence over the king or had its say in the shaping of the destiny of the state is not very clear. However,

from the inscriptions and seals of the time it appears that the kings summoned this council whenever there was an emergency or some important matter was proposed to be discussed. Chandra Gupta I summoned it when he proposed to choose Samudra Gupta as his heir. One of the chief causes of the fall of Rama Gupta and the accession of Chandra Gupta II was the unpopularity of the former and the popularity of the latter with this assembly. It seems that during this period the king nominated his successor but final approval was given by the Sabha.

Machinery of Government

It has been stated earlier that in the administration of the state the king was assisted by a team of ministers who were drawn from various parts of the state. Unfortunately we do not have the details of this council and have to depend upon the scanty information available to us from inscriptions and seals of this period. We come across names of several officers called Kumaramatyas, like Harisena, Sikharasvamin and Prithvi Sena from the records of Samudra Gupta, Chandra Gupta II and Kumara Gupta. They belonged to high class of officers of the Imperial Guptas. Perhaps there were other categories of officers also about which unfortunately we do not have any information at present. These officers did not belong to the royal families and were presumably drawn from the Brahamanas who as a class wielded great influence over the Guptas. They were very much respected by the rulers and were addressed very respectably by them in correspondence. Their advice was seldom disregarded and even if a king had to use his veto sometimes he did it in a way calculated not to hurt their feelings. Kalidasa has also used very dignified and exceptional phrases for this category of officers like Bhavan and Arya.

Among the Kumaramatyas of the first rank we may perhaps include the members of the cabinet who were the virtual rulers of the state. One of them presided over the meetings of the council. He was perhaps known as Mahakumaramatya, although we have not so far come across this

phrase in any of the Gupta inscriptions or seals. He was expected to convey the gist of the deliberations of the council to the king and ascertain his views about the matter. He was expected to be a man of a very high calibre. Manu chooses a Brahmana for this post and states that he could be entrusted with the entire administration of the state. Besides the Mahakumaramatya there were other Kumaramatyas entrusted with the various departments of the state. The king normally kept the department of finance directly under his control. However, in the department of revenue he was assisted by a minister who, in addition, was also given the charge of some other portfolio. The minister for revenue was responsible directly to the king and was required to report day-to-day developments to him. In the department of law and justice the king was assisted by ministers. It is true that Gupta monarchs were conversant with the Shastras and the laws of the land, but with all their qualifications, they had a council in the matters of law and justice. Sukraniti stresses upon the king not to act individually in the judicial matters. Kalidasa also holds a similar view. There was another minister in charge of foreign affairs. He kept a strict watch on the happenings on the borders of the state and acquainted the king with any circumstances that may arise due to some internal disturbance, anarchy or disorder in an adjoining state and it may be necessary to lead an attack on it. The Gupta monarchs had to maintain friendly ties with many bordering states. Thus they were to have a very good department of foreign affairs to keep them equipped with up-to-date knowledge about the neighbouring areas. He corresponded with the neighbouring countries on behalf of the government and kept a record of it. He negotiated alliances on behalf of the king. Presumably, he was known as Sandhivigrahika.

Besides these top-ranking ministers, there were several other important officials at the centre and in the provinces who were known variously. In the Damodarpur Copper Plate Inscription we come across an officer bearing the designation of Kumaramatya, who was a district officer. It lends support to the fact that there were different grades of

Kumaramatyas and a district officer might be the Kumaramatya of the second or the third grade.

There were other officers who enjoyed absolute power in the provinces. These officers belonged to the royal family. From an account of the period of Kumara Gupta I it appears that these high posts which were hitherto reserved for the members of the royal family were thrown open to commoners of merit. These provincial governors had their counsellors to help them in the administration of their respective areas. The provinces were further sub-divided into districts and the lowest unit in the Gupta empire was a village, which was under the control of a *gramini*.

The Gupta administration, on the whole, was a well-knit organisation with its different departments under the charge of experienced officers who were drawn from respectable families having a long record of loyal service to their credit.

Judicial Administration

A study of the contemporary law books reveals that the king was not above law. He was only an administrator of the laws of the land which had been framed by the wise men of the past. The supremacy in the framing of the laws of the land lay with the people.

The Gupta emperors were enlightened rulers. A study of their inscriptions and seals tells us that they were fully conversant with the laws of the land. The three great law-givers of the period, i.e. Brihaspati, Narada and Katyayana, tell us that the king-in-council was the final authority in matters of administration of the laws of the land. He was the chairman of the supreme court and the final appellate authority. He delegated his powers to judges who held similar courts in the capital cities of the different provinces. Below them there were junior courts at the district level. The last and perhaps the most popular court in the judicial heirarchy was the village assembly or panchayat. In some cases the supreme court of the king functioned also

as the initial court. From times immemorial the village assemblies enjoyed vast powers and a majority of civil disputes and minor criminal cases were disposed of by it. A case was brought before the village council only when the representatives of a particular community had failed to settle the dispute among their members. In the case of dissatisfaction with the decision of a village council, the plaintiff could approach the district court. If he was dissatisfied with the judgement given by the district court he could lodge an appeal with the chief judge of the province and finally with the king. It was, however, very seldom that the decision given by a district or provincial court was set aside by the supreme court of the king. The people had great regard for the laws of the land which had come down to them from generations since the ancient days. They took them as sacred and submitted to them without any objection.

The king, according to Gautama, was guided in the administration of justice by laws of three types :

(*i*) The Vedas, the Dharmashastras and the other holy scriptures.

(*ii*) All such customs and usages of the committees, localities and Kula, which were not contrary to the sacred law.

(*iii*) Customs and laws in vogue among the different groups of society like cultivators, herdsmen, money-lenders, traders, artisans, etc.

The ancient laws were simple. Mostly, there were no written laws. However, the people were more than satisfied by the decisions of the court. When arriving at a decision a court kept in view the following four points :—(*i*) It tried its best to ascertain the real truth. It was possible only by a thorough scrutiny of a case. Gautama has thus described the procedure in vogue 'Reasoning was the chief means of arriving at the truth employed by the king. In difficulty, decision was given after consulting Brahmanas who had grown old in gaining knowledge of the Vedas. Sometimes, truth was discriminated from falsehood by

examination of witnesses by the king, the Pradvivaka or a Brahmana who was conversant with the law.'

(*ii*) It gave preference to, rather based its decision on, the evidence given by a respectable and reliable man of the locality where the incident had occurred. As in majority of cases the witness was an eye-witness or furnished information to the best of his knowledge, there could seldom be any complication later on. The court also depended upon the evidence given by its trusted people of the area of the occurrence. During the Gupta period the king had appointed such people all over the country as his representatives for the maintenance of law and order and to report to the government the correct evidence of the incidents in their areas. These dependable people helped the government to a great extent to arrive at a correct decision.

(*iii*) Instead of framing its own laws the government depended more upon the customs and precedents of a particular area. When the two parties in a case belonged to the same occupation or section of society, their customs were always kept in view when arriving at the judgment. These customs and usages were preferred even to the new laws or edicts issued by the king in case these were contrary to the sacred laws of the land.

(*iv*) The king's proclamations or edicts issued on certain matters of doubt or dispute came next.

Thus, the laws of the land were based on truthfulness, correct evidence, customs and precedents and the king's orders issued in this respect.

As the number of civil cases increased, the Guptas, with the help of their legal experts, had to elaborate the judicial laws of the land. This has led some writers to say that the judicial laws of the Guptas were very complicated.

The evolution of the judicial laws of the land was also due to the foreign influence. The foreigners settled on the Indian soil and had their own customs and institutions.

The king was considered as the protector of the land. He was required to maintain law and order in his empire

and was the chief-judge. It was expected of him to rule in such a manner that both the strong and the weak could live together. As an administrator of the law the king had also to see that the punishment inflicted was sufficient and did not exceed the limits. In the inscription of Skanda Gupta it is boldly asserted that the punishment given was proportionate to the crime or guilt of a person and nobody was oppressed unduly. The Gupta kings felt proud of their administration based on the laws of the land. It has been asserted in the Allahabad Pillar Inscription that Samudra Gupta established a government based largely on the Dharmashastras. At the time of their coronation, the Gupta kings had to take a pledge that they would always chastise the wicked and the criminal. The comparison of Samudra Gupta and Skanda Gupta with Lord Varuna amply confirms their assertion in this respect. In fact, without law and order no government could exist and it was for their good government, a long spell of peace and prosperity, that the Guptas have been complimented by the historians.

The ancient law-givers had prescribed punishments in accordance with the gravity of the offence. However, it was emphasised again and again that the king was the protector of the weak and the oppressed, and should treat his people like his children. This leaves no doubt about the good intentions and sincerity of the Guptas. They gave equal opportunities to all their people, high or low. They did not show any partiality to either of the two parties and gave their judgment in public in accordance with the laws of the land. It is stressed upon the king in Sukraniti that he should never listen to law suits alone. It is further stated that king or the councillors should never try the cases *in Camera*. The petitions and appeals of the people should be heard by the king in the presence of ministers. Manava's Dharmashastra, which was faithfully followed by the Guptas, says that the administrator of law is the real king, the ruling authority, and the surety for the population. It is further stated in this book that the king who employs it properly, prospers, but if he ignores it and adopts unfair means, *Danda* destroys him. It cannot

be wielded by dictators. Only an honest king true to his coronation oath, who goes by the Shastras, and rules with the co-operation of his ministers could wield the sceptre.

From what is stated above it is clear that there was no place for a king who tried to take the laws of the land into his own hands. The Shastras go to the extent of advising the people to revolt against a despotic ruler and to destroy him rather than submit to his dictatorial rule. It is enjoined upon the king that at times he should ascertain the opinion of the people about his policy and the various measures enforced by him. The government was in fact a trust with him and he had always to take his people in confidence. If he found that the people did not approve his policy, it was in his interest and in the interest of the state to withdraw all such measures and to enforce only such laws as were popular and were in the interests of the people.

It was also enjoined upon the king to ascertain the true implications of a law from the old experienced people, well-versed with the laws, when there was the slightest doubt, rather than to deliver a wrong judgment.

As stated earlier, there was a great development in the judicial functions of the king during the Gupta period. According to Dr. Naresh Chandra Sen Gupta the Sabha became the chief constitutional advisory body to the king and the judicial powers were delegated to permanent the judges.

It was not only on the king but also on his council that the law-givers of the time imposed moral and religious restrictions. When the country did not prosper, or the people were not happy, or the army grew weak, or the royal treasury became empty due to the policy of the ministers, or there was a despotic king, there was no justification for their existence. It was enjoined upon the ministers to keep a very strict watch over the king and his policy and to establish in the country a constitutional monarchy wherein the people's interests were kept to the forefront and the self-interests of the king or the ministers were relegated to the last. The ministers had to deal with all the important

matters of policy sincerely without feeling jealous of one another if their view-points on a certain subject were not approved by the majority of their colleagues. It was also in their interest to see that all the decisions on the state problems and matters of policy were written down. The Shastras go to the extent of saying that a king, or his ministers, who took decisions verbally, and who did not reduce the laws of the land or their decisions to writing were no better than thieves. The king had always to respect the law and for any lapse was to be awarded punishment which was thousand times the punishment laid down for the same crime for a commoner. Similarly, there was a very severe penalty for a panch or a judge of a court who ignored law in order to please the king or a member of his council. It is stated by Narada that the jury which gave a verdict against Dharma, was not considered to be moral. The judicial assembly was not to be consulted at all, but when done, a fair opinion should be delivered. The man, who either keeps silent or delivers a decision contrary to justice, is a sinner.

There was a striking contrast between the judicial system prevalent in India during this period and the one prevalent in the Western countries. Up to the 17th century the judges were considered as lions under the crown in England. It was not the case even 1500 years earlier in India. The judges had to deliver their judgment in accordance with the laws of the land which had to be implemented by the king and his administrative machinery. The judges had to assess the extent of crime and decide upon the appropriate punishment. Even in the cases of appeal against their decisions, the king had several limitations. The judges were normally learned people drawn from the community of the Brahmanas. As they were fully conversant with the laws of the land, it was very difficult for the king to decide contrary to their decision. They had already gone through the details of the case with the help of a group of jurists so thoroughly that very little scope was left for the king to find new points on which he could over-rule their judgment. Secondly, the king had to decide the cases

not in his individual capacity but in his council which was a team of experts. They had to view the case from legal aspects in the light of the precedents. It will not be out of place to mention here that the king's proclamations, edicts or special orders could not have been binding in the majority of cases as his orders ranked only third in order of priority. The first two priorities belonged to the sacred laws of the land and customs and usages. The king's council was drawn from the Brahmanas. Katyayana, however, tells us that merchants of high birth, who were rich enough to stand above the temptations of wealth, were elderly, experienced, well-read and of good conduct, were also eligible for inclusion in the council. The king's decisions in the matter of law were influenced by his council which was also known as sabha. This council had virtually become an authority to lay down the laws and this was a great check on the whims and caprices of the kings in the administration of justice.

In the course of study of the inscriptions we come across the names of Mahadandanayaka and Mahakshapatalika as the judicial officers during the Gupta period. Mahadandanayaka presumably combined in himself the duties of a magistrate and a police officer. Mahakshapatalika was incharge of the records of proceedings of the different cases of law and the legal interpretations of various points given. Perhaps we may come across more names as more seals and inscriptions are discovered. The office or court where the administration was located was perhaps called Adhikarna.

According to the opinion of some writers, there were four types of courts during the Gupta period. They were Pratisthita (city and village courts appointed by the monarch), Mudrita (court of Pradvivaka), Aparatisthita (a circuit court) and Sasita (a court which was presided over by the king). For the forests and other similar places there used to be mobile courts. This is confirmed by an extract of the text of Brihaspati cited by Mayukha, which says that for the benefit of the residents of forests the court should be in the forest; for soldiers it should be in the army and for merchants in the market.

Dr. R.K. Mookerji writes that the local bodies enjoyed independence during the Hindu period who had the power of independent legislation. When the people started leading a settled life, these local bodies framed laws, which regulated the life of the community, by common consent. By long usage these laws became part and parcel of the people and it became virtually impossible for the later rulers to challenge these and to try to substitute these by other laws. Even the great law-givers like Gautama, Narada and Brihaspati acknowledged the soundness of these laws and advised the kings to give them preference over the new laws which the kings might introduce. However, it was explicitly understood that these laws were to be preferred only if they did not clash with the sacred laws of the land. As the Gupta kings aimed at the establishment of a popular government, they always kept before them such laws of the different communities. They advised their judges to give their decisions in accordance with these laws. When dispensing justice, the king always consulted the wiseman of the communities who had framed these laws, his counsellors and the judges. Thus, in the law court the first priority was given to the sacred laws, the second to the laws of the different communities and local bodies, and the third to the king's law. It was the duty of the king to see that nobody violated these laws and that these were enforced with all strictness. All those who went against them were punished. They were even deported from the country. Through these laws an agreement was presumed to have been reached among the community as a whole. According to Brihaspati the deed of agreement was a document of mutual understanding executed by the people of a village not against the interests of the king, and in accordance with the laws.

Narada gives us many names of the bodies responsible for the administration of justice. The smallest of these was a *kula* or a family meeting. The government and the community always desired that a dispute should be settled in the family itself if it was between the members of the same family. The meeting of a family, where such cases were considered, was known as *kula*. The head of the family

in such cases had an indisputable position and his decision was binding on both the parties. When a case was not disposed of satisfactorily by a *kula*, it was brought before the community called *sreni*. In the case of dissatisfaction with the decision of these lower bodies the case was taken to *gana* or village assembly. Higher to *gana* was the law court presided over by an officer appointed by the king. The ultimate court was the king's court to which, according to Narada, lay the last appeal. Against its judgment there was no appeal. The case, however, could be submitted to the king for review and reconsideration.

Narada has written that a trustworthy man of the locality can be the best judge and it was always better for the government to call him and ascertain the truth of the case. In addition to the judges, other people were also attached to a court to keep the records. They were an accountant and a scribe. They maintained an up-to-date record of all the cases. When a case went up to the supreme court the relevant records were studied by the council of ministers and the king. The king also had some truthful and confidential men from the different localities in his service. Besides summoning the witnesses and the two parties involved in a dispute he also required reliable people to be called at the time of the hearing of the case. This work was entrusted to the men of the lowest class, i.e., the Sudras. In some cases it became hereditary.

The village court was located at the meeting place of the village panchayat, the district and the provincial courts had their headquarters in the principal town of the district and the capital of a province, respectively. The supreme court was located on the outskirts of a royal palace and the king presided over its sessions. The court of law was known by the name of sabha. A judge was popularly known as pradvivaka. While minor disputes were disposed of at the district court level, important cases and all such cases as involved imposition of capital punishment came up before the supreme court. Brihaspati writes that the responsibility for the award of corporal and capital punishment vested with the sabha. This is, however, contrary

to what has been stated by Fahien. According to him there was no death penalty or any other corporal punishment. The criminals were only fined lightly or heavily according to the merits of each case. In the case of repeated attempts at rebellion the right hand of the culprit was cut off. This, however, does not appear to be true. Other contemporary records bear witness to several inhuman modes of inflicting punishments. The inhuman punishments were in vogue during the Gupta period. It is evident from the contemporary account of Dandin. In a statement he throws an indirect hint on a brutal punishment meted out to a king's minister. Before awarding capital punishment both the king and the chief justice made pretty sure that this would meet the ends of justice and was not in excess of the crime committed by the doomed person. Narada enjoined upon a king to have judges who are very well-versed in the 18 titles of the law and their sub-divisions. They had to be well-conversant with the different branches of sciences, strong-willed and patient enough to pass sentence on the murderers and such other malfactors as had become a menace to the society. There were three ways to dispose of a case. The first was the disposal by arbitration, the second was the law-suit and the third by ordeal. In the first case the experts of the particular class or community, to which the two parties belonged, were summoned to settle the case amicably and to avoid unnecessary litigation and wastage of time, money and energy in mutual disputes. The second alternative was that of the law suit. It was enjoined upon the government officials not to launch a law suit ordinarily. However, the common people could file a suit if they could not get justice either from their community or their village panchayat. The case was thoroughly investigated and if it was found, that the plaintiff was justified, and was really an aggrieved party, summons were issued to the offender and he was given some date on which he should produce himself before the court. If he absconded, warrants for his arrest were issued. The hearing began as soon as he was arrested and produced before the court. The defendant was given an opportunity to defend himself and to prove his innocence through witnesses or documentary evidence.

Witnesses of noble birth who understood the law and who were respectable, were invited from the locality where the incident had taken place. Their statements were recorded and given due consideration. It is interesting to note that in the case of theft when a part of the booty was recovered from a thief, the culprit was forced to meet the claims of the total loss suffered by the plaintiff.

The seals and inscriptions of Kumara Gupta provide sufficient evidence of his zeal for the establishment of a benevolent government. Kalidasa perhaps had him in his imagination when he wrote in Raghuvamsa, that during his reign even the wind dared not touch the clothes of drunken women who lay senseless on the thoroughway to the pleasure-ground. The king diligently perused the various cases brought before him. It is borne out by a story told by Kalidasa. He states that a merchant died in a shipwreck. The king was informed about it. According to the law of the land the whole of his property was to be vested in the king, as the merchant had left behind no son. The king, however, investigated the case further and it was found that one of the wives of the merchant was pregnant. The king did not confiscate the property and it was restored to the widow of the deceased when a child was born to her.

Kalidasa tells us that when a thief was caught red-handed he was awarded capital punishment. The infliction of this punishment involved curious ceremonies. The condemned person was annointed all over the body by red sandal and was decorated with flowers. In some cases the dead body was even embellished with ornaments. The most common forms of capital punishment were trampling under the feet of an elephant, throwing before a hungry lion, etc. If the criminal happened to be a Brahmana he was only blinded.

The king ensured a very strict watch over gambling dens, houses of prostitutes, ruined temples and the wine shops. These places were the favourite haunts of the thieves and other criminals. The owners of the wine houses were men of repute who helped the government in the arrest of

such persons. Torture to death and several other types of inhuman punishments were also awarded. This is borne out by the Junagarh Rock Inscription.

Dr. N.C. Sen Gupta has given a very detailed account of the judicial procedure adopted by the government and the stages through which a case normally passed till it was finally decided. He writes that only cases involving crime or serious social offences could be initiated in the king's court. However, as the time passed and the king's justice became very popular, the aggrieved people frequently approached him for redress. Whenever a case was brought before it the court had to satisfy itself that the complaint was within the ambit of the law and only then the summons were issued. Yajnavalkya says that the complaint of the plaintiff was recorded. If it was found unsatisfactory the court rejected it straightaway. According to Manu the plaintiff had to lodge the complaint personally. However, Narada allows a brother or a father to act as attorney. According to him there were two types of complaints : one, which was made after the wrong had been done, and the other, when the plaintiff only apprehended danger. After the summons were issued and a date for hearing was fixed the parties had to present themselves before the court and the hearing began.

Sukraniti has stated that the Pradvivaka and the members of the jury ascertained, by majority of opinion, the procedure in the supreme court. Decision was taken in the light of the old and contemporary laws, witnesses were examined, oaths were administered, the ordeals were resorted to, evidence was taken, opinion of the community was ascertained, etc. After all this had been done, the Pradvivaka advised the king accordingly.

The statements of the two parties were recorded. If the plaintiff won the case and the judgement was given in his favour, the defendant was awarded suitable punishment or fined. Narada, Katyayana and Brihaspati, the three great contemporary law-givers, lay down that a decree, containing statements of the plaintiff and defendant, the points at issue, the particulars of the evidence, the decision

of the court and the names of the *sabhasadas* who were present, should be given to the plaintiff.

The persons who could act as witnesses in the civil and criminal cases have been described by Manu. According to him house-holders and not ascetics could be witnesses. Their names should not be sponsored by either of the two parties. They should be conversant with the laws and above temptation. They should not be related to or estranged with either of the two parties. Majority of the opinion of witnesses was to be the criterion for deciding the issue.

Documentary evidence had to be produced by the two parties in the king's court and attested by a government official. This could also be done privately by the two parties and bear the signatures of reliable witnesses. These could be even without witnesses or an attestation but must have the signatures of the two parties.

Where no satisfactory evidence, oral or documentary, was forthcoming, the government resorted to the disposal of serious cases by ordeal. During the Gupta period, however, the ordeal was milder than that prevalent in earlier times. There were five types of ordeals, viz. *tula*, *agni*, water-test, poison and *kosa*.

Tula, or ordeal by balance, is described in detail by Katyayana. The acused was weighed first in the usual manner and then accompanied with the recital of the Mantras. If he weighed more in the latter case he was declared as innocent. However, if he weighed less he was declared guilty and was awarded punishment.

In *agni* or ordeal by fire, seven *asvattha* leaves were placed on the palm of the accused and over them a red-hot iron ball was placed. The accused had to walk seven steps across seven circles round the fire. Then he was required to throw away the ball. If his hand was not burnt, he was declared as innocent, otherwise he was considered guilty and punished.

In the water-test, as described by Dr. Sen Gupta, the accused had to dive under water holding the knees of a person standing in the water. Another person shot three arrows at

a target hundred and fifty cubits away. A third man, waiting near the target, picked up the arrows one after the other. If the acused could keep himself completely immersed under water all this time he was declared innocent.

The fourth was the ordeal by poison. The accused was required to take a certain quantity of poison. Then, he rested under the shade of a tree and was watched. If there was no effect of poison on him during a specified period of time, he was declared as innocent.

The last was the ordeal of *kosa*. The accused was required to worship the images of Rudra, Durga and Aditya and after bathing them took three cups of water. In case no calamity fell upon him during the following fortnight he was considered as innocent.

The details of these ordeals have been given differently by various accounts. Dr. Sen Gupta has described these ordeals as follows :—

In the water ordeal, the accused was put in one sack and a stone in another. The two sacks were than thrown into a deep stream. If the sack containing the stone floated, and the other sank the man's guilt was taken to have been proved. The fire ordeal required the accused to kneel on hot iron, walk on it, to take it into his hand and lick it. If he was not hurt, he was considered innocent and *vice versa*. In the weighing ordeal, the accused was weighed against stone. If the latter was lighter, the charge was taken to be false, and *vice versa*. The poison ordeal required that the right hind leg of a ram be cut off. Poison was put into it and the accused had to eat it. If he was innocent he was expected to survive, and *vice versa*.

A person sentenced to a long imprisonment was sent to royal jail. It was situated underground and was completely dark.

Lot of details about criminal cases are available from the contemporary records but unfortunately these are lacking in respect of the civil laws. Presumably, the majority of such cases were disposed of at the district level and did not receive as much publicity as the criminal cases, which

were brought before the supreme court and were mentioned in the royal records.

On the whole, the situation of law in the country was encouraging. Fahien bears testimony to this fact. According to him crimes were few and far between. People were of high moral character and in spite of the fact that the laws were not very strict and the punishments light, the people avoided going against these. We cannot take a statement merely at its face value but we can say that the situation under the Guptas was far more encouraging than that during the troubled times preceding or succeeding their period.

REVENUE ADMINISTRATION

All the activities of a government have to be based ultimately on the question of finance. The department of finance has, therefore, always been accorded a special importance. The Finance Minister of the cabinet enjoyed a privileged position and his views carried special weight in the meetings of the council of ministers. His approval had to be obtained on all the schemes and programmes which the government proposed to undertake.

The king derived his income from six sources. According to Prof. Upadhyaya these were (*i*) Land Revenue, (*ii*) Irrigation, (*iii*) Customs and Excise, (*iv*) State monopolies, (*v*) Taxes, conquest presents and tributes and (*vi*) Lapse of property to the crown. He had to spend mainly on three items: (i) Religious programme, (ii) salaries of ministers and government officials and (iii) natural calamities and foreign affairs. By right of conquest, the king could levy tax. The plundering of the wealth of the Southern potentates by Samudra Gupta is an example of this nature.

Of the six sources of revenue, the land revenue was the most important. The Gupta rulers always kept before them the prosperity of the cultivators. They realised that in their prosperity lay the prosperity of the state. Their coronation oath contained the undertaking to treat the agriculturists favourably and look after their interests. There is difference of opinion about the actual amount collected by

them. According to some writers 1/6th of the total produce was realised. Others say that it ranged between 1/2 and 1/12th of the produce according to the fertility of the land. In 'Sukraniti', it is stated that the government should realise 1/3rd of the total produce of land irrigated by tanks, 1/4th of those watered by the canals and wells and 1/2 of those irrigated by rain-water and river-water. In the case of barren and rocky lands the government should collect only 1/6th of the total produce. There is a view that during the Gupta period the maximum rate of land revenue collection was 1/6th. For lands which were not very fertile, it ranged between 1/8th and 1/12th according to the fertility of the soil.

The king had the right to collect this revenue as his remuneration for the services rendered by him to the country. Some writers believe in the State ownership of all the lands. The king, in his capacity as the landlord, gave these lands to the people. It was within his right to collect land revenue. This is, however, disputed by some writers, who quote Narada and other contemporary law-givers to prove that the king was not the master of all the lands and the revenue collected by him was in fact the reward for the services rendered by him to the community and the protection he afforded to the holders of the land.

In fact, a kind of contract existed between the king and the people. Sukraniti also endorses this view. Manu holds similar view and writes that a king was justified to realise 1/6th of the produce of land if he was not careless in the discharge of his duties and did not fail to protect the people from whom he realised the land revenue. The king was also required to exert his utmost to ensure increase in the produce of the land, and the prosperity of the cultivator. In the days of drought and famine he was expected to advance loans and help the people to tide over the crisis. If a king showed carelessness in the welfare of the people, the law-givers gave freedom to the people to revolt against such a king and even transfer the allegiance to the neighbouring king if the latter happened to be better suited. The Gupta rulers, as is evident from their seals and inscriptions,

took keen interest in the welfare of cultivators. For example, when the dam over the Sudarshana Lake burst during the period of Skanda Gupta the king took rest only when the affected people were rehabilitated. The Gupta kings took precautions that the cultivators did not suffer as a result of the movement of the army. When they attacked their enemies they always ensured that the crops were not damaged. During their reign production of the land increased greatly. From the account of Fahien it is evident that the country was passing through very flourishing times. The people were prosperous, happy and loyal to the state.

The Gupta kings believed in the principle, later adopted by SherShah Suri, that the government should be lenient at the time of assessment of the land revenue but should be very strict at the time of its collection. Kalidasa tells us that people were very enthusiastic in the payment of taxes from which even hermits and the beggars were not exempted. This willingness was due to the fact that in exchange for this they enjoyed complete protection of their lives and property. The people did not avoid this payment as it was not something imposed by the government on its own but had the sanction of the sacred books and laws. We are told that the land revenue was not considered as a burden by the people. Indeed, heavy taxes were imposed on the public women, gambling establishments and gamblers. Another interesting point is that the Gupta kings did not spare religious estates, or lands given in charity to religious institutions, from the payment of land revenue.

The amount thus collected was not squandered away by the king on himself and on the maintenance of his court. A large share of it was spent on the welfare of the people and on measures for their protection.

During the Gupta period irrigation mainly depended upon rain. In Northern India the irrigation was mostly carried on either by the river water or by the rain water, and in some areas, by wells. All such areas as were situated within easy reach of canals and the rivers and did not have to depend upon the rains, were very fertile. The king was advised to realise a large amount as land revenue from

these areas. However, areas where the tanks were built to store rain water were not required to pay land revenue to that extent. As the government had to incur lot of expenditure to arrange for the storing of the water, a surcharge was levied on the lands which were irrigated from tanks.

The land revenue was not uniform or fixed: it varied according to the fertility of land. There were various categories of land. Those directly administered by the crown were known as crown lands. Some lands were the property of private people and government had no control over these. It could only collect the revenue in respect of these. To the third type belonged the land which was a private property but had been given to the tenants for cultivation purposes. The owner employed them either on wages or gave them a part of the produce of land in lieu of their labour. The government also took 1/6th of the total amount realised by the owner on the sale or transfer of the land. It is borne out by the Faridpur Plate No. I.

There were three other kinds of land—Samudayabahya, Aprahata and Khila. The first of these did not fall within the jurisdiction of the village community. It was a sort of communal holding and a fixed annual revenue was levied on it. It was collected from the village community. In some cases the collection was also made by a government official known as Agraharia and deposited in the royal treasury. All the lands which had been given to Brahamanas as grants for religious purposes or as gifts were rent-free. The Aprahata lands were the lands which could be cultivated after reclamation. Normally people cultivated vegetables and fruit on these lands. The third type of lands, called Khila, were barren lands. These were left uncultivated mostly, and sometimes were converted into a pasture, or used for building houses. Fahien tells us that the king distributed land among the cultivators and collected his share of revenue after the production of every crop through his officers. Thus, we find that the king was not the sole proprietor of all the lands of the country and private landlords were in existence during the Gupta period. However, when a king conquer-

ed certain regions, he transferred his claim to others after charging a fixed sale price for those lands.

The assessment of the revenue was not a parmanent settlement. It varied according to the production of the crops. From contemporary inscriptions, seals and other records we know that the government had constructed dams in some areas to store water to provide against droughts and other calamities. The government maintained a permanent record of all the lands. There was a regular machinery for the collection of revenue and exercising proper control over the lands of the country. Unfortunately, we do not have detailed account of this machinery. It is, however, certain that revenue was collected both in kind and in cash. The people who paid in cash were given lenient terms. The government carried out surveys of some lands. These were graded and the revenue was fixed. Its amount fluctuated with the yearly produce of the land but margin was not very big and the government could estimate its total income.

The Imperial Guptas had a thorough insight into the land problems of the state and their administration of land revenue and irrigation systems has won for them a very important place in the history. Besides the revenue proper there were several other customary payments which were made by the people to the government officials when they visited their villages. For example, when an officer or a government army passed through the village, it was a practice to offer them milk, flowers and, whenever convenient, two meals.

Excise and Customs

We do not have detailed information about the commodities on which excise duty was levied. From the account of Dandin, and some other inscriptions, it appears that the people were very fond of drinking and wine was very popular with the rich and the poor, the males and the females. The government could not have ignored to levy a tax on this item which was such a common luxury. It seems to have collected large sums through this item. Besides, we

have on record that wine, women (public women) and gambling-dens were heavily taxed. The main object was to discourage these evils. It is certain that during the Gupta period a flourishing trade existed with the European and Far East countries. The custom duties supplemented the income of the kings.

State Monopolies and other Undertakings

Among the main state monopolies and undertakings Kalidasa mentions the construction of the projects, state farming, rearing of cattle and catching of elephants. The government also collected 1/2 of the total income from a mine. The king was considered to be the master of the produce of the land both above and below its surface. When a mine was discovered it was reported to the government. The construction of projects was the duty of the state and the people were expected to contribute towards the cost or to pay a tax for its use later on. Even today we come across several such instances where people have to pay a toll-tax to cross a river by using a bridge. The catching of elephants was another very advantageous item. It brought to the government a considerable income. Similar was the case with the state farming and the rearing of cattle. Although the government charged a nominal tax on the grazing of cattle, in the long run it yielded a big amount to the government. Agriculture, cattle-breeding and trade constituted 'varta' according to Arthashastra. Through the treasury, the army and products of the 'varta', i.e., cattle, gold, forest produce and free labour the king could control friends and foes alike.

Taxes

The taxes imposed by the Guptas were in accordance with the ancient laws and customs. A king had no independent authority to impose any type of tax. The Gupta kings were far-sighted enough not to pick up quarrels with their councils or assemblies over the question of taxation, thus avoiding a situation faced by the Stuart kings in the history

of England. The king left this issue to be settled by his ministers who were required to collect taxes and maintain an account of income and expenditure. Both the people and the king realised that the taxes were remuneration for maintenance of law and order. The king collected these taxes from the people according to their capacity to pay.

From the mahajans and industrialists the king collected 1/10th of their sale proceeds. For the assessment of the tax on the industrialists the labour employed by them and the output of the factory were taken into account. The cost of maintenance and the establishment were also accounted for and it was ensured that a sufficient margin of profit was left to the producer. The latter, therefore, did not have any grudge against the king's share. A tax on various commodities imported from abroad was also collected. However, while taxing the imported articles the distance of the place of origin was also taken into consideration. Heavy cost of importing and the risks involved in the process, especially when the means of communications were not well-developed and safe, were kept in view. Only such things were imported as were necessaries. If they were luxuries, they were required to be harmless to the nation. The Gupta kings always encouraged the activities of the merchants.

The government nationalised some industries like salt and opened industrial establishments on a large scale. It made elaborate arrangements for the supply of raw materials at a fixed price to the industries. Export of the various finished goods in large quantities from India to the foreign countries confirms the view that industrially India had advanced under the Guptas.

The government also collected a large sum through its judicial administration. This included several types of fines for transcending the law. It was an important source of income. Treasures or deposits discovered under the earth were also added to the government coffers. The government could also increase its income through the issue of currency and coins. The latter contained a specific amount of gold,

silver and copper and the government decidedly gained by the issue of currency.

Conquests and Presents

Another source of income of the government was by the right of conquest. Samudra Gupta overran the whole of Northern and Southern India. He returned to his capital with 100 camels laden with gold and silver. Similarly, Chandra Gupta II captured the greater part of Western India and incorporated it into the Gupta empire. Some of the rulers of the neighbouring countries became anxious to develop relations with their more powerful contemporaries. The court of Samudra Gupta was visited by several chieftains who brought costly presents to him. The ruler of Ceylon sent him such costly presents and in such large quantity that some of the writers misunderstood these as a sign of submission of the ruler to the Gupta monarch. The people in the different parts of the country brought presents of horses, elephants and gold to the king. According to some customs and conventions, suitable presents or gifts were required to be given to the king by his subjects and subordinates when they visited him.

Lapse of Property

An interesting case of the death of a merchant in a shipwreck has been mentioned. He left no male issue but had two wives. His property was being lapsed to the state when the news of the pregnancy of one of the wives was brought to the king. He stayed the confiscation of the property and ordered to wait for the birth of the child. Kalidasa, Dandin and other contemporary writers tell us that a woman without a son could not inherit the property of her husband and was eligible to get only a maintenance allowance.

All the above sources enabled the Guptas to amass lot of wealth and they were in a position not only to win for themselves a respectable place in the contemporary world but were also in a position to give to the country

a very successful and stable government. As they were never short of money they did not have to resort to such measures of taxation as might make them unpopular with the people. Even during their darkest days when India was invaded by Huns and there were internal disturbances the money amassed by Guptas helped them to tide over the crisis. They are known for their system of finance and currency. Even though the later kings, like Skanda Gupta, had a hard time, still the government did not resort to any undue taxation to meet the situation.

The Guptas were not only adept at collecting money but also knew how to spend it. They remitted the land revenue or other taxes when there was some calamity. They gave special concessions to the educated classes and did not charge any income tax from them.

The government did not levy any tax on the military officers as they knew that a disgruntled army could not save the country from the foreign enemies whole-heartedly. On the other hand, we find that they controlled public women, gamblers and actors. They gave no freedom of movement to beggars and thieves. They discouraged usury.

The state controlled the import of luxuries and export of things of necessity. It tried to nationalise several important industries. The small industries, however, were left to the private entrepreneurs. Thus, while amassing money, the Guptas never lost sight of the principles which go to make a government popular and its people happy.

Expenditure

As stated earlier the people were taxed by the government to pay remuneration to the crown for the protection and assistance rendered by it to the people. The Gupta rulers never lost sight of the principle underlying the statement of Kalidasa that the ruler takes away a share of the people's income with one hand only to return it with the other, thousand times more than the sum paid. For the small amount which a man pays to the government, the latter provides several advantages to him. His life and property

is safe. He is not unduly oppressed and is given all those facilities which a person is expected to have under a normal civilised government. It keeps in view all the interests of an individual, the well-being of his children and the interests of his family and community.

The amount collected was partly spent on the salaries of the government officers appointed to the different departments of the State. The salaries were fixed and every government employee was paid in accordance with his work. To guard the country against the foreign aggression the Gupta kings maintained a very strong army. The soldiers were recruited from among the tax-payers and their relations. A part of the income was spent by the king on himself and his personal staff.

Provincial Administration

The Imperial Guptas ruled over an extensive empire which was comprised of the whole of Northern India and a part of Southern India. The system of communications was not fully developed. It was, therefore, not easy for the emperor to exercise effective control from the capital. Need for delegation of power to the officers and princes of royal blood was, therefore, felt. The empire was divided into many provinces. We do not know their number.

Fahien wrote that administration was very good and peace and prosperity prevailed everywhere. The people could move from one place to the other without any fear of molestation at the hands of robbers or highwaymen. The Guptas selected suitable and trusted persons to serve as the provincial heads. This was particularly necessary for the management of such parts of the empire as were either in a disturbed condition or were newly incorporated into the empire. Thus, Skanda Gupta was satisfied only when he was in a position to secure the services of Pranadatta as the governor of the Western zone. Skanda Gupta has described his views about the qualities which go to make a good governor in the Junagarh Rock Inscription. He selected persons endowed with intellect, modesty, wisdom, truth,

straight-forwardness, nobility and discretion. A governor was expected to possess sweetness of temper, civility of manner and fame. His mental calibre and honesty should have been tested and found pure. He was expected to have the inborn and natural inclination to discharge the debts and obligations which the state owed to its people. His mind should be occupied with the thought for the welfare of mankind. He should be capable of enforcing lawful acquisition, proper preservation and augmentation of wealth. He should be competent to bear all the burdens, maintain an effective control over the far-flung areas, and have the capacity to meet the most difficult situation with competence. We know from the accounts of the reign of Kumara Gupta I that the post of viceroy, which was so far reserved for the members of the royal family, was thrown open to the commoners if they were found fit.

The Guptas did not divide their border regions into small provinces as this would have helped the foreign invaders to capture them easily. There were some regions which had been under one chief or the other from time immemorial but had enjoyed unity as a single administrative unit and were inhabited by a particular race. It was very difficult to break up such units without incurring the hostility of their people. There were some provinces which were fairly large and others which were very small. Dr. Dikshitar writes that this division was not based on any scientific principles such as linguistic affinity or geographical contiguity but was the result, largely, of historical, and political accidents. These administrative units were known by different names. For example, in some parts of the country they were known as *Desas*, in others as Bhukti and yet in others as Khanda. In the Eastern and Western parts of the country we come across another name, *Mandla*, for the largest administration unit. In the Western regions a similar big unit was known as *Pathaka*.

The Gupta empire was divided into several provinces which were further sub-divided into smaller divisions, and districts. The smallest unit was a *Grama*. *Desa* was the largest administrative unit and was large enough to be equi-

valent to a modern province. It was under the control of a viceroy who was appointed by the emperor himself. This unit is mentioned in the Sanchi Stone Inscription of Chandra Gupta II. *Bhukti* was another equally important unit. It was, however, smaller. We find it mentioned in the Damodar Copper Plate. Some of the writers go to the extent of saying that it might have been only a big district. This, however, does not seem to be correct, as *Bhukti* was definitely a larger unit, perhaps equivalent to a commissionate of the present times. The *Khanda* was presumably a sub-division of *Desa* and was under the control of an officer appointed by the governor. *Pura* was another unit which resembled a tehsil. Another unit which is mentioned in many Gupta records was a *Visaya*. It was a very popular unit, presumably akin to a district, and used to be governed by an officer known as *Visayapati*. We come across the name of another big administrative unit known as *Mandla*. The Faridpur grant of government of Dharmaditya has described this unit as consisting of several *Visayas*.

The seals and inscriptions of the period enable us to know about the government and the system of administration in vogue in the provinces. The governors were appointed by the emperor himself. There were two types of administrative units, those which enjoyed internal autonomy and were independent in their internal administration, and those which were directly administered by the Gupta emperors through their viceroys. The control over the former type of administrative units was very nominal. The administration of several states which had acknowledged the supremacy of the Guptas was in accordance with the times and the needs of the people. For example, the states situated at a distance from the capital city, which were fairly big and were only nominally under the Gupta supremacy, had that type of administration which today we may think to be independent of any influence of the Guptas over them. These feudal lords paid occasional customary visits to the Gupta court and paid tributes. Some of these had the authority to issue coins and other privileges normally enjoyed by independent rulers. They had

sub-feudatory lords under them who controlled the different areas in their name. There was another class of states which were situated very near the Gupta capital. Although they had been given the privilege of internal autonomy, they could not maintain aloofness and were greatly influenced by the Gupta administration. From the contemporary records we gather that the Gupta emperors had appointed a foreign minister to keep a watch over the feudal lords and princes and to see that these people did not exceed the limits of a feudatory.

The governors of the provinces were known as *Uparikas*. Many of them enjoyed the title of a Maharaja. He was assisted in his administration by a group of civil and military officers. They helped him in running the administration of the different departments of the provinces and a majority of them were appointed by the viceroy himself.

Besides these, the governors had their personal staff also which consisted of a private secretary and several clerks. We also come across the name of another important official, known as *Kumaramatya*. It is difficult to define the exact nature of this office. Some writers feel that they were like our present Indian Civil Service and Indian Administrative Service officials and could be posted to the different departments of the state anywhere in the empire. With the passage of time some of them rose to the high positions of provincial heads and even ministers.

Visayapati, the district officer, was appointed by the *Uparika*, the provincial governor. However, in some cases he was directly under the control of the emperor. We come across a reference in another chapter where the Visayapati is said to have paid his homage direct to the Gupta emperor. A *Visayapati* was generally selected by *Uparikamaharaja* and recommended to the Gupta emperor who appointed him. Besides *Visaya* there used to be several other small units, like Bhoga which according to Fleet was a bigger unit than Visaya and was under an officer known as *Bhogika*. We also come across several other names like *Prayuktakas*, *Sarvadhyaksha*, and *Sadahanik* who presumably were also district officers.

It is unfortunate that details about the administration at work in the different provinces are not available. We have some definite records only about the periods of Kumara Gupta I and Budha Gupta to know about the administrative machinery at work during that period. A district used to be under a *Visayapati* who was like a district magistrate. He was the chief authority in all the civil, judicial and executive matters of the district. All other officers in a district were under his control. His headquarters was known as *adhisthana* and his office was known as *visayadikarna*. He was assisted in his administration by a group of officers as have been listed below by Dr. Dikshitar:

1. *Saulkika*	Superintendent of tolls and customs.
2. *Agraharika*	Officer making settlements of Brahmanas and temples.
3. *Gaulmika*	Forest officer.
4. *Dhruvadhikaranika*	Superintendent of the royal share of produce in grains.
5. *Bhanda Karadhikrta*	Officer in charge of treasury.
6. *Utkhetayita*	Collector of taxes.
7. *Talavataka*	Village accountant.

Besides these, there were some non-official members who advised *Visayapati* in the administration of the state. These people were drawn from the different bodies and organisations and were experts in the fields of industry and trade. These people were considered as the virtual administrators of the districts. They were the *Nagara Sresthin*, the *Sartha Vaha* (the chief caravan leader) the *Prathamakulika* (the chief merchant) and the chief artisan (guild president). There were two assistants to the district officer. One was the chief scribe whose duty it was to record all the deliberations at the meetings of *Visayapati* with his advisers. The other was known as *Pustapala* who maintained a record of these deliberations. These district officers had vast powers. From the contemporary records we

gather that they had the power to sell cultivable and building lands. Some of these offices used to be combined in one person. For example, from the Allahabad Pillar Inscription we gather that Harisena was known as *Sandhivigrahika Kumaramatya* and *Mahadandanayaka*, which means that he combined in himself civil, judicial and executive authorities. We also come across several references where the offices of *Bhogika* and *Amatya* were combined in one person. Majority of these offices were hereditary and both the king and the law-givers of the time preferred to keep these high posts in hereditary succession in particular families.

Village Administration

The village was the lowest unit in the Gupta administration. Villages from time immemorial had enjoyed internal autonomy and the Guptas appreciated this and never disturbed the village institutions in their functions and privileges. Each village was under the charge of a headman who was known as *Gramayaka* or *Gramini*. He was responsible for the maintenance of law and order in the village and settlement of all such disputes as may arise over the boundary between his village and the adjoining areas. He was also a collector of land revenue on behalf of the government and helped in the maintenance of the records of the lands of the village. He was also a *Sarpanch*. It was also his duty to help the civil and police officers in the performance of their duties when they visited his village. He had to make arrangements for their board and lodging during their stay.

There were several other officials connected with the village administration. There was one known as *Mahattara*. He has been mistaken as an officer of the government in the village as his name has been associated with the land transactions. In fact he was a government official but was the oldest man in a village. His advice was very often sought for in all civil and judicial matters by virtue of his experience. Some feel that he was not necessarily the oldest man of the village. Some leading men in the

village, owing to their wealth or position in society or intelligence might have been given the privilege of being appointed the *Mahattara* of the village. Besides the *Gramini* and the *Mahattara* there was another group of people in the village known as *Ashthakuladhikarana*. They were consulted on all matters concerning land and justice. Some writers think that they were local officers who exercised authority over a group of eight villages and performed judicial functions. According to Dr. Basak, they had supervisory authority over eight *Kulas* or families. As the name implies, they were not officials of the government. They were associated with the different communities and families of a particular village. *Ashthakula* stands for eight families and we may presume that in a village for every eight families there used to be a person to represent their voice in all the land transactions and judicial matters concerning the village community.

Another official associated with the village administration was known as *Talavakata*. Some writers think that he was the village accountant while the others say that he was a village chowkidar. Another important government official in a village was *Valatkusan*. He was presumably like the patwari of today, who maintained the land revenue records of a village. He has been mentioned in one of the contemporary records, which has been translated by Dr. Fleet. The village headman was assisted by the village assembly which had not yet outlived its utility and was popular. The people were elected to the assembly and had their voice in the administration of the village.

MILITARY ADMINISTRATION

The Guptas ruled over a very extensive empire. By dint of their valour, courage and capability in the field of war they had been able to convert their small principality into a vast empire. Chandra Gupta I was the first of the Guptas to take up the title of *Maharajadhiraja*. He ruled over Magadha, Avadh and some adjoining territories. His son Samudra Gupta extended his sway over the whole of

Northern India and subjugated the rulers of the South, although he did not annex their territories to his empire. From the Allahabad Pillar Inscription we gather that he had to wage hundreds of battles during his life-time. Chandra Gupta II rounded up the frontiers of the empire and extended it to the farthest end in the West. He had to fight the Saka satrapas. Skanda Gupta had to fight the Pushyamitras who rose in rebellion, and the Huns, perhaps the greatest warring race of the world in the early centuries after the Christian era. The Roman Empire tottered before this menace, and the whole of the Middle-East and Central Asia lay crushed. Skanda Gupta not only warded off their attacks but inflicted such crushing defeats on them that they were not heard of in India for about two decades after Skanda Gupta. All this speaks for the grand organisation of the Gupta army. Without a good army and a proper discipline and organisation, the Guptas could not have been able to give to India a long peaceful period of about two centuries.

However, we do not have many details about army and its actual strength, but the scattered references about its organisation help us to draw a sketch of its grand organisation.

Kamandaka, in his *Nitisara* has enabled us to draw a sketch of Gupta military organisation. He enjoins upon the kings to launch an attack against all those states who were not looking after the interests of their people properly. This is confirmed by the declaration made by Samudra Gupta immediately after his succession. He declared that he would liberate the whole of Aryavarta from the hands of the foreigners and such rulers as were tyrannical despots and did not rule in the interests of their people. One of the chief causes for the total extermination of the nine rulers of the North by Samudra Gupta was that none of them was a benevolent king. Some writers have condemned this policy of the Guptas as an aggressive policy but the law-givers of the time approved it. It had also the approval of the king's council. Compared to this, the policy followed by Samudra Gupta in the South was extraordinarily

liberal. The Southern kings were not only liberated but were also restored to their territories after their defeat when they paid him tribute and acknowledged his supremacy. This policy in the South has been called the policy of *Dharam-vijaya*.

The Gupta kings had a council of war which advised them on all matters of war and peace. From *Kamandaka* we get an insight into the type of such advice. The king was advised to enlist the support of all the forest people and such others as were neutral. Chandra Gupta II was intelligent enough to get a manual of politics and administration prepared. It was with the help of this manual and the council of war that the king considered different problems connected with war and took decisions. For example, in the manual the government was enjoined upon to enlist the help of the neutral states before embarking upon conquest. He had to try to befriend allies of the enemies by offering them attractive terms. If a king was in a position to enlist the help of all the neutral powers, and that of the allies of his enemy he had the chances of success even without a war. In case a king was not in a position to sow dissension among the allies of his enemy, he was advised to adopt a policy aimed at paralysing the allies of his enemy. If possible, the king should try to sow dissension among the army of his enemy by even bribing some of the officers of his enemies.

The king was also enjoined upon to keep a strict eye on the rank and file of his own army. Those of them who had not been recruited from the adjoining regions and others who were attracted to the battle mainly by the lure of booty were to be kept at the fore-front. Next to them were the soldiers recruited from within the country for the war and last of all were the trusted, loyal and regular soldiers, who had been in the king's service for several years, had seen many battles and had proved their worth in several engagements. The king was enjoined upon to be very considerate towards his enemies after the victory. If it was considered worthwhile to befriend the enemy, the king was required to show all consideration to his enemy. The lives of the vanquished people were respected and the country of

the enemy was not to be plundered or devastated. If, however, the annexation of the country was considered advantageous, the king was enjoined upon to exterminate the enemy completely and to punish very severely such officers in the enemy's camp as were considered to be loyal to the other camp. The king was advised to be very liberal to the people of that country and to show regard and respect for their ancient institutions, customs and privileges. The king was advised to appoint the best of his officers as the governor of the conquered territory and to establish the best government so that the people should not feel the change and join hands with the rebels.

The king was advised to consult the war minister in all matters of policy and to give due consideration to the opinions and suggestions expressed by the war council. The king was told that a sincere advice could bear fruit and a king who acted in accordance with the advice of his sincere councillors would never repent. It is thus evident that the Gupta war council played a very important role.

ORGANISATION OF FORCES

Kamandaka, Kalidasa and other contemporary writers tell us about the weapons of war, the mode of warfare, the organisation of the army and the positions which the various units occupied in the field. There were two types of conquests. A conquest in accordance with the rules and against a tyrant was called a *Dharam Vijaya.* A conquest of another country and restoration later on, of the conquered territories to the legal monarch, after his paying tribute and acknowledging the supremacy of the victor also came under this category. When a king marched against another country without any excuse or provocation with a view to extend the boundary of his empire, the victory was known as *Lobh Vijaya.*

The contemporary accounts tell us that the Gupta army was controlled by six departments. There were foot-soldiers known as infantry. The second category was of the horse-riders known as cavalry. The elephants

formed a separate unit each of which carried three fighters and a *mahaout*. The fourth category was of the chariots on each of which there was one driver and two fighters. Kalidasa writes that the chariots were no longer as popular as they used to be during the early Vedic age. The fifth department was of the naval forces. It maintained the royal fleet. This branch of the army organisation was becoming more and more popular with the development of trade relations with the Eastern and Western countries and the East Indies, i.e. Java, Sumatra, Borneo, Ceylon and Burma. The last department was of transport and commissariat which controlled the supply of the stores, war material and looked after the roads.

The organisation was based on the lines of the set-up of the Mauryas. Each department was under a council of five members and each council was represented at the centre by one of its members. The central war council consisted of six representatives of the six different departments. The king could ask for the position of a particular division from its representative. He was the commander-in-chief of the army. From the inscriptions of the Gupta period it is evident that many a time the king was fighting in the thick of the battle. The seventeenth line of the Allahabad Pillar Inscription says about Samudra Gupta that he was dexterous in waging hundreds of battles with the prowess of his arms. The beauty of his charming body was enhanced by the multiplicity of the wounds caused by the blows of battle-axes, arrows, spears etc. There is also the example of Chandra Gupta II who risked his life in going to the camp of the ruler of Malwa in the guise of Dhruva Devi. He was also present with the Gupta forces in his campaign against the Saka satraps. Skanda Gupta personally led the Gupta army against the Pushyamitras and the Huns. We also come across some other titles of the military officers during the Gupta age from the contemporary documents. The later Guptas, presumably, preferred to stay at the royal court and appointed a *senapati* to lead the forces to the battle.

The Malwa Copper Plate grant of Dhara Seva II tells us about the post of a *senapati*. The Bijaygadh Stone

Inscription mentions a military rank of *Mahasenapati*. Presumably, it was equivalent to the post of commander-in-chief of the army in the modern times. *Baladhikrita* was another military officer who commanded a division of the army. It is referred to in the Shahpur Stone Image Inscription. There was yet another military rank, that of a *Mahabaladhikrta*, presumably higher than the one stated above. The other names of the officers that we come across are, *Mahasandhivigrahika*, *Mahadandanayaka*, *Gupta* and the warden of marches. These officers held different divisions and administrative posts and were equally important.

The Guptas attached more importance to organisation than the numerical strength of the army. They realised that a small but better disciplined army was better than a huge raw army. The duties were clearly demarcated between the various divisions of the army. Within a particular division itself also there was further delineation of duties.

The elephants were put in front of the forces in order to clear the forests and thorny bushes to enable the army to advance. They were also employed to break through the walls, get around the enemy's camp and to disrupt the lines of the enemy's army. They were equally useful in retreat and pursuit. The Indians knew their advantage in the elephantry division against their foreign foes. Therefore, we find that the Gupta rulers made special provisions for the preservation of elephants and also made arrangements for regular supply of them for their armies from the regions of Assam and Kalinga.

The Gupta monarchs understood the utility of the cavalry equally well. This division was larger as compared to the elephants division. The Guptas arranged for the proper supply of best war horses from Arabia and other countries of Middle-East. Kalidasa also mentions the popularity of horses in the army in his works. He refers to the excellent breed of horses imported from Arabia and Kamboja. He describes their wonderful speed, and the stables where they were kept. Generally, the cavalry was placed in the centre of the army. It was the main fighting force.

The chariots were also used in the battle-field but they were no longer in vogue so much as they used to be in the early days.

The foot-soldiers contributed to the real strength and number of the army. They accompanied the elephant unit when the roads were to be cleared and the place of camp to be selected. Their duties were manifold. Not only they had to select an advantageous position for the camp but they were also required to plan a route for retreat in case of defeat. The infantry had several divisions. There were hereditary soldiers and those who had been recruited in emergency. There was a division comprised of persons attracted from the enemy's camp. Last of all, there was the division formed by recruitment in the forest regions. Except the first division, which was very reliable, the other troops were placed at the forefront of the army so that they could not jeopardise the position by desertion or treachery.

Kalidasa gives us a vivid picture of the army marching to the battle-field. He writes that cavalry formed the vanguard of the army. In the actual battle the soldiers in each division of the army fought their counterparts in the corresponding division of the enemy's army. By an unwritten code of conduct a soldier never struck at a fallen foe.

There were six categories of soldiers. The best of them were the hereditary soldiers, who had been in the king's service for several generations. Their loyalty had been tested time and again and there was no doubt about their *bona fides*. These forces normally formed the king's bodyguard and during the war remained in the reserve. They were popularly known as *Maulas*. The second category was known as *Bhrityas*. They came next to *Maulas* in loyalty, steadfastness and preference. They were also paid by the king but were neither hereditary nor had served for a long period. The soldiers of the third category were known as *Suhrts*. They were not directly in the king's service. They were maintained by his allies and supplied to him to supplement his army in war time. They were like the feudal armies or the levies of the mansabdars of the Mughals.

They could not be relied upon so much as the soldiers of the first two categories for their loyalty to the king. Generally, in the battle-field, they were placed a few stages ahead of the two categories of soldiers stated earlier. The fourth category of soldiers were known as *Sreni*. We may compare them with militia of the contemporary England or the territorial army in India today. They were not paid. The trade organisations and other bodies in the country, who enjoyed the confidence of the Gupta rulers thought it their moral duty to help the government in times of emergency by making available as many soldiers as possible from themselves. Presumably, these soldiers were utilised for maintaining law and order in the country. A few of them were also used for camp services and in the battle-field. It is stated in the Mandasor Stone Inscription of Kumara Gupta I that these soldiers became thoroughly conversant with the science of archery. The soldiers of the fifth category were known as *Dvisads*. They were not reliable and their loyalty was not above suspicion. They were kept at the front of the army and were utilized for clearing the roads and employed at those places where there was a great danger to life. The last category was of such soldiers who were recruited from among the warring races during emergency. They were known as *Atavikas* which means foresters. They were the least civilized but past masters in the science of war. Samudra Gupta was the first of the Gupta rulers to realise their importance. They were barbaric and one of the chief causes of their readily joining the royal forces was the lure of plunder and loot in the enemy's country. They were considered as the best people to lead an attack as they were fearless and very hardy. As sincerity, courage and high morality were the main considerations to enable a soldier to rise in ranks, we find the soldiers anxious to prove their mettle in the battle-field.

A fairly long list of weapons of war used by the army in the battle-field has been furnished by the Allahabad Pillar Inscription wherein it is stated that Samudra Gupta, in the thick of the different battles, had received scars and wounds by weapons like battle-axes, arrows, spears, pikes,

barbed-darts, swords, lances, javelins, iron arrows, *vaitastikas*, etc. Kalidasa has also given a long description of the different weapons used by the soldiers in the battle-field. He divides them into two types, i.e., *Astra* and *Sastra*, the first being the weapons thrown with the help of a machine and the second, which were used by the hands. These war implements according to Prof. B.S. Upadhayaya are *Bana*, (an arrow), *Dhanus* (a bow), *Sula* (a pike), *Trisula* (a trident), *Sakti* (a spear), *Vajra* (a kind of club made of iron), *Parasu* (a battle-axe), *Cakra* (a discus), *Asi* (a long sword), *Bhindipala* (a heavy iron rod), *Parigha* (a club studded with iron spikes), *Mudgara* (staff hammer of iron), *Hala* (a sort of plough-share), *Ksurapra*, *Bhala* (a spear or javelin like weapon), *Gada* (the mace), *Brahmastra* (a missile) *Gandharvastra* (hypnotic practice causing sleep), *Slings* (a small machine), *Sataghni* (a big machine), and *Khadgahand* (a short sword). Besides these offensive weapons there were also some defensive weapons, like helmet, gloves and coat of mail which are also mentioned by Kalidasa. Dandin has referred to bow, discus, lance, barbed-dart, spear, club and the mace as weapons of war during his period.

Kalidasa names some musical instruments which too were used during the war. It was to the rhythm of the beat of the drum that the forces marched to war. They advanced towards the battle-field to the accompaniment of war music, with thrilling tunes, reminding them of their past glory and achievements of their ancestors. These musical instruments were *Turya* (the war-horn), *Dundubhi*, *Ghanta*, bells and the conch.

From a reference by Kalidasa we know that women also took part in the war. They had different jobs to do. They were employed in the camp-kitchens, in the performance of ceremonies and also to keep the army in a jubilant mood. All such defeated soldiers as were captured were made prisoners of war. Generally they were released on the birth of a heir apparent to the king, or on the coronation of a king.

Besides the six departments of the main army there was an administrative office which maintained a strict con-

trol over the army and kept a proper record of its day-to-day activities. This office also enjoyed the key-position, as all the orders concerning the army personnel, their duties and their services, were issued from here. It was directly under the Gupta monarch. It kept him informed about the day-to-day developments in the army's different divisions as well as the consolidation effected in the newly-conquered areas. The efficiency of this office has been referred to by Kamandaka. Presumably, its set-up was based on the line of the office maintained by the Mauryas.

Each department of the army, i.e. infantry, cavalry, elephants and chariots had a commander of its own. Their activities were co-ordinated by the issue of necessary instructions about their programmes and duties by this office. It also looked after the work of the commissariat department and the navy. It also supervised the requirements of the royal harem (in case it accompanied the king to the battlefield), the requirements of all the civil servants and other miscellaneous matters which needed attention in the battlefield. Obviously, this office had a very onerous task to perform and but for its proper and efficient functioning the whole of the organisation would be without any co-ordination or system.

As stated before the different departments of the army were represented in the king's council. This council, popularly known as the war-council, took all decisions, with the king in the chair, on all important matters of peace and war. This was conveyed to the war-office from where a general ordinance was issued to all the departments of the army. The contemporary lawgivers have enjoined upon the king never to lose the trust of his council, or to over-ride their decision as otherwise he would have to repent later on. The advice of the council was an expert advice, as its members represented different departments and were thoroughly conversant with their spheres of work. However, the king was also expected to consult his cabinet before taking a final decision in the matter. He had also to keep in view the information furnished by his spies. A king who consulted his war council, his spies and his cabinet before taking a

decision, according to Nitisara, was always successful in his object. The Gupta rulers never lost sight of either the advice of their war council, spies, cabinet, Dharma Shastras or law-givers.

The Gupta rulers were also popular with their commanders, war-counsellors, cabinet and the army and this was one of the chief causes of their success. The Gupta emperors personally led their armies to the battle-field. They were accompanied by their war-council, even by some members of the cabinet, particularly the minister for peace and war, and were, therefore, in a position to take decisions on the spot in the light of the circumstances and emergencies.

Diplomatic Relations

The boundaries of Gupta empire were contiguous with several small and big states. There was always a possibility of their coming into conflict with any of them in the course of their expansion. The eventuality of a foreign aggression had also to be considered. It was, therefore, necessary for them to maintain diplomatic relations with their neighbours. The Allahabad Pillar Inscription gives a list of the states which were situated on the borders of the empire which maintained friendly relations with the Guptas through their ambassadors.

The ambassadorial ties, as we understand now, had not yet developed and there was no regular exchange of embassies. From the available records, however, we know that the Guptas did maintain friendly relations which did not fall short of such exchanges of embassies with the states of Samatata, Devaka, Kamarupa, Nepala, Kartripura and Ceylon. The later Guptas carried on correspondence with some of the European countries and the ruler of China. The relations with the European countries were purely commercial while those with China were mostly religious concerning the collaboration between the scholars of the two countries to translate books on Buddhism in

Chinese. With other states the relations of Guptas were political.

Kamandaka tells us that Gupta rulers selected very capable persons as their agents to these countries. It is interesting to note that these agents did not stay in the states to which they were sent and were expected to do many more things which it is difficult to appreciate now. They had even to risk their lives at times. They were expected to study the details of day-to-day life in the countries where they were posted and ascertain the degree of discontent prevailing there against its ruler. They had to disguise themselves sometimes to conceal their true character. A good agent was one who had a very keen observation and perception, possessed sharp memory, was polite and gentle in his speech, active, quick-witted and very capable. He was expected to advise his master in the matter of war with the enemy. He was also required to explore the possibility of a settlement with that enemy if that was advantageous to his master.

Thus, we find that the Gupta kings did not always have recourse to war. By sheer impression of their mighty arms they forced many of their neighbouring states to pay tribute and acknowledge their supremacy. They could extend the boundaries of their empire to any extent but were advised not to be expansionists, as this policy might render it impossible for them to give good government to the conquered territories. The king was also enjoined upon to remain at peace with a neighbouring state governed by an equally heroic king and to avoid a struggle with him the result of which might be doubtful. Some of the Gupta kings adopted certain methods to gain victory which might appear very cheap but an examination would show that these were justified by the Nitisara. For example, through matrimonial alliances Chandra Gupta I raised his prestige and status. Through the marriage of his daughter with the Vakataka king, Chandra Gupta II extended his sway over the whole of Western India.

Samudra Gupta was the first of the Imperial Guptas who established diplomatic relations. He cherished the

dream of unification of Aryavarta. But this did not stand in his way to have diplomatic relations with his neighbours. In majority of cases, however, his relations bore the characteristic stamp of his over-lordship. Thus, the states of Samatata, Devaka, Kamarupa, Nepala and Kartripura were not better than the states which had accepted his supremacy. Although Samudra Gupta never marched in person against them, annexed or conquered their territories, their acknowledgment of his supremacy and their offers of presents indicated that they were afraid of him and could not afford to displease him or estrange relations with him.

The available evidences show that the Gupta influence had spread over the regions of Champa, Java, Sumatra and Funan. The language of the various inscriptions found there is Sanskrit. All these islands, though not directly administered by the Gupta emperors, had been so powerfully knit by the diplomatic ties with the empire that their language, culture and civilization were profoundly affected. We have the details of the relations of Samudra Gupta with Meghaverman, the ruler of Ceylon. We are told that the younger brother of the Ceylonese king and another monk visited India on a pilgrimage to the sacred Buddhist places and to collect religious texts. They encountered many difficulties and hardships. On their return they complained to their king about this. Thereupon the king of Ceylon sent valuable presents to the court of Samudra Gupta as a tribute and requested for the establishment of a monastery at Bodh Gaya for the pilgrims. Samudra Gupta agreed to this.

The Saka chiefs, who flourished on the Western borders of the Gupta empire, were also converted into friends through diplomatic ties. The period of Chandra Gupta II also saw the development of relations with some of the neighbouring states. Fahien bears testimony to this.

CHAPTER V

Religion Under The Guptas

RELIGION UNDER THE GUPTAS

Religion has played a very important role in the early history of India. The religious leaders enjoyed more respect than even the king. They were virtually king-makers. The religious laws got preference over the temporal laws. Fortunately the role of religion was constructive.

The Gupta period experienced all round progress in different spheres and the various religions could not remain isolated from this wave of progress. The spread of education disciplined the minds of the people to find a reason for everything presented to them. They refused to accept a system which did not appeal to their reason. They could not accede to the orthodox religious customs and ceremonies without any logic. Even the sacrifices, which at a time had grown so popular were fast losing their hold over the common masses.

Hinduism of the past assumed a dynamic form with the evolution of the theory of trinity, representing Brahma in the role of the Creator, Siva as the Destroyer, and Vishnu as the Preserver. With more practical experience of life, people expected their gods also to be presented in a practical shape. This change in attitude influenced to a great extent Buddhism and to a lesser extent Jainism. Mahayanism was the product of this changed outlook. Jainism did not, however, respond much to the changing circumstances and therefore remained confined to a small section of the Indian population.

The Brahmans, the priests of Vaishnavism and Saivism, the two important sects of Hinduism were the most enthusiastic. They wanted to regain their prestige, position and place, which they had lost to the rising influences of Buddhism and Jainism by their too much insistence on the old sacrifices, customs and rituals. Vedas were now presented in a more logical shape and the wisdom of these books was explained lucidly to the people. Vishnu and Siva were no

longer mere imaginary figures. Instead they were presented in the form of attractive idols and placed in the temples for the worship of common people. The triumph of Vaishnavism over Buddhism was complete when Buddha was recognised in the pantheon of Hindu mythology as an incarnation (avatar) of Vishnu.

The Puranas, the religious literature of this period, throw a flood of light on the day-to-day religious life of the people. Vishnu, the Preserver, was the most popular god of the period. Shiva, the Destroyer, was no more considered to be so. Instead he was regarded as a god which expelled darkness and took people to enlightenment. He came next in popularity. Brahma, the Creator, was also respected but was not as popular as were the first two gods.

Vishnu was considered as the most powerful of the gods who again and again appeared in different forms to redress the grievances of the weak and punish the offenders. There were believed to be nine avataras of Vishnu. He is stated to have appeared in the form of a Vamana at the prayers of Indra when the gods had lost everything to the demons, and restored Lakshmi, the goddess of prosperity, which had been kept away by the demon king Balli from 'Indra' the lord of the gods. He is again stated to have appeared in the form of a fish and forewarned Manu about the coming destruction over the world and later on saved him when all round there was water. Vishnu is again shown in the form of a Varaha (Boar) who lifted the earth from the bottom of sea. Again, he is stated to have appeared in the form of a tortoise to save an elephant, who but for his tusk had been completely taken down under water by a crocodile. Vishnu is also stated to have appeared as Narsimha or man-lion to avenge the cruel and inhuman acts of Hiranyakashapa towards his son Prahlad. Vishnu also appeared in the form of a man. Matsya Purana tells us that Rama of Jamadagni, Rama Dasarthi Dattatraya, Mandhatri, Veda Vyasa, Buddha and Kalki were all the incarnations of Vishnu. Thus Vishnu, more than any other god of the period, appeared in different forms periodically to redress the suffering

of his devotees and won for himself a supreme position in the minds of Indian people.

Idol worship had another important effect. All over the country there was a race for the presentation of their respective gods in the best possible form. The period thus produced the finest and the rarest specimen in the art of sculpture. Idols of Vishnu, Siva, Buddha, Mahavira, Lakshmi, Parvati, Durga and Kartikeya remain unsurpassed in the later centuries for their elegance, perfection, serenity of demeanour and grandeur.

Another important aspect in the religious outlook of the period was the spirit of toleration. The Gupta kings respected all religions alike and not only showed toleration towards different religions, to which they did not profess but also set apart large amounts for their upkeep and maintenance. There was even a move to unite the different religions and to achieve the best results of the teachings of different religions. From the account of Fahien we gather that Nalanda University, which was a great seat of learning, patronised scholars without distinction of their religion, caste and creed. The Buddhist and Jain scholars enjoyed the same privileges, which had been extended to the Brahman priests and other Hindu religious pundits.

Mahayanism had relaxed many rigid principles of the old Buddhism. Even the Grihasti (a person having family) could join it without renouncing the wordly life. There was also a complete accord between the different sects of Buddhism, Mahayanists and Hinayanists were residing together in the same monastery at many places. Buddhism, however, was fast losing its old charm and spell over the masses. Vaishnavism had taken its place at many of the important centres. Jainism was also on its decline. It was popular among certain families belonging to middle class and in a few centres like Mathura and Malwa, where it still holds ground. Buddhism, similarly, could count its popularity only at centres like Afghanistan, Panjab, Mathura and Patliputra. Important places like Kapilvastu, Sarnath which were connected with the life of Buddha were shorn of their influence.

It is difficult to say what was the religion of the Guptas. From their coins, inscriptions and seals it is evident that they worshipped different natural powers of the Vedic age, which were known by specific names. They showed reverence for the different sects of Hinduism and tolerance towards Buddhism and Jainism. Dr. Dikshitar has aptly remarked that the age of the Guptas was marked by a rational and sensible cosmopolitanism in which no rancour or jealousy was present.

On the basis of the available records of this period, historians, both Indian and European, have concluded that Guptas were followers of Vaishnavism. Mathura was their centre of influence. The Greek scholars have also made a mention of the spread of Bhagvatism or Vaishnavism among the people inhabiting the regions around Mathura. This sect, however, received a set-back with the establishment of the Kushan rule in India; Kanishka being a patron of Buddhism. It revived again under the Guptas who, however, never declared it as their State religion. The Guptas have been stated to be patrons of Saivism also.

Before starting on his trans-continental tour of conquest, Samudra Gupta, the first Gupta monarch, attracted the warrior classes by his inclination towards Bhagvatism or Vaishnavism, the most popular cult in Hinduism. As we know, the response was very encouraging and the people joined him in great numbers in his campaign and it did not take him much time to over-run the whole of Northern India. In the Allahabad Pillar Inscription he proclaimed that he was a supporter of the real truth of the scriptures and fond of the company of the learned people. He compared himself with the gods, like Dhanada, Varuna, Indra and Antaka; all of them Brahmanic deities. He has also been described as a giver of many hundreds of thousands of cows, to the Brahmanas. It is stated that his missionary zeal spread his fame far and wide like the rays of the moon. His coins also indicate his leanings towards Hinduism (particularly Vaishnavism). His Ashvamedha coins show that he followed the ritual prescribed by the scriptures for a Hindu

monarch. His Gaya Copper Plate grant describes him as a restorer of Ashvamedha which had long since been in abeyance. From Garuda emblem (the vehicle of Vishnu) we get a supporting hint about his leanings towards Vaishnavism. Again, he has been described as Parama Bhagavata Maharajadhiraja, which further confirms the above view.

The successors of Samudra Gupta were equally enthusiastic for Hinduism (particularly Vaishnavism). Chandra Gupta II has been styled as Parama Bhagavata in the stone inscriptions of Mathura and Gadhwa and the Nalanda seal. His son, Kumara Gupta I, is also known by this title. This is evident from his Bhitari and Gadhwa Stone Inscription. His coins also prove his leanings towards Vaishnavism. In his Archer type of coins we come across Garuda and the goddess Lakshmi. Similarly Skanda Gupta has also been described in the Bhitari Stone Pillar Inscription that after his victory over his enemies Skanda Gupta got an image of the god Sarngin erected. He was none else but Vishnu. Junagadh Rock Inscription of Skanda Gupta contains eulogy of Vishnu.

Similarly, the Eran Stone Pillar Inscription of Budha Gupta also depicts the Emperor's leanings towards Vaishnavism.

From what has been discussed above, the writers, both Indian and European, have tried to prove that the Guptas were patrons of only Vaishnavism which they propagated through their coins, inscriptions and seals. The Emperors developed a love for this sect partly because it was the faith of the majority of their subjects as a result of the revival of Brahmanism. Probably they also had another reason. According to the scriptures by basing his Government on the sacred law, the king could carve out a suitable place for himself in the next world. This is evident from the Allahabad Pillar Inscription, where Samudra Gupta is stated to have gone to the abode of Indra, and also from the performance of horse sacrifice by both Samudra Gupta and Kumara Gupta I.

Dr. Dikshitar, however, does not agree with the plea that the Guptas were Vaishnavites. According to him

there is no scope for making such a statement as the neo-Hinduism had not yet been born. People worshipped different deities only as various forms of one God in whom they believed. Guptas have been labelled as Vaishnavites as they styled themselves as Parama Bhagavatas; Lakshmi, the consort of Vishnu, appears on the majority of their coins; Garuda, the vehicle of Vishnu, appears on the seals of that period; flag staff of vishnu is mentioned by name in the last inscription of Budha Gupta and Skanda Gupta in his inscriptions praises Vishnu. However, the term Prama Bhagavata does not necessarily mean one who is a devotee of Lord Vishnu, as can be interpreted to-day It also means a devotee of Bhagavan. This cannot imply only to Lord Vishnu who was only one of the deities of the time. It is a general name of the Almighty. It could be any other deity like Siva. This leads us to the conclusion that Guptas believed in the Universal God as the Creator, the Protector and the Destroyer.

Lakshmi was the consort of Vishnu, but this word also means wealth and prosperity. We can explain various inscriptions only if we interpret Lakshmi in the latter sense. For example, in the first line of the Junagarh Rock Inscription we are told that Lakshmi was kept away by the demon king Balli from Indra, who, through the help of Vishnu, got her back. Lakshmi here surely means prosperity. The Guptas knew it well that all the undertakings of the Government depended upon Lakshmi or wealth. They were thus its true worshippers. On the coins the figure of Lakshmi in fact depicted Rajyasri, i.e. the wealth of the kingdom of the ancient Hindu monarchs.

In regard to the appearance of Garuda and flag-staff of Vishnu, the two emblems on the seals, it may be mentioned that the Bull or Nandi of Siva also appears in some of their records. Thus, no special importance can be imparted to the two emblems of Vishnu.

There are various contemporary records which prove that the Guptas were also inclined towards Saivism. Several temples of Siva were erected during the Gupta period

e.g., at Bhumara, and Khoh. There is a temple dedicated to the worship of Parvati at Nachna-Kuthara. The inclination of Chandra Gupta II towards Saivism is evident from the Udayagiri Cave Inscription wherein it is stated that Chandra Gupta II personally visited the temple of Siva (Shambu). The Mathura Pillar Inscription of Chandra Gupta II records the installation of two lingas by him. We also come across coins of the Gupta monarchs wherein the Bull has been given prominence. An examination of a Bull-type coin of Skanda Gupta proves that he also had his leanings towards Saivism.

It can, therefore, be concluded that the Gupta emperors were not fully inclined towards Vaishnavism. They respected all the different deities. As Dr. Dikshitar has pointed out that as the Vedic injunctions were the law of the land at that time, the State religion could not be narrowed down to one particular form.



Chandra Gupta I

King & Queen Type



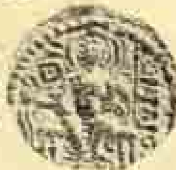

Obverse Reverse

Samudra Gupta

Standard Type




Archer Type

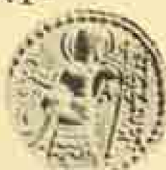
Battle-Axe Type




Ashvamedha Type




Lyrist Type

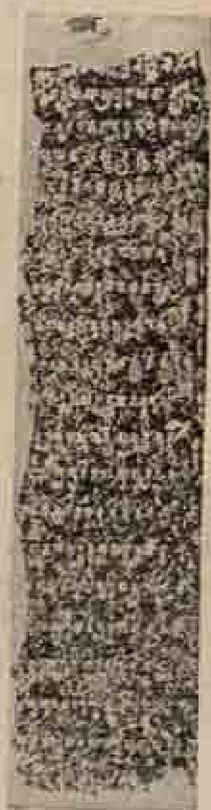
Tiger Slayer Type



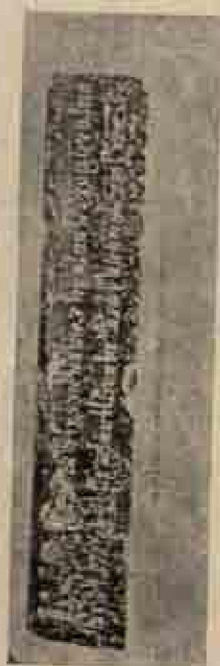

Obverse Reverse Obverse Reverse



Allahabad Pillar Inscription of Samudra Gupta



Eran Stone Inscription of Samudra Gupta



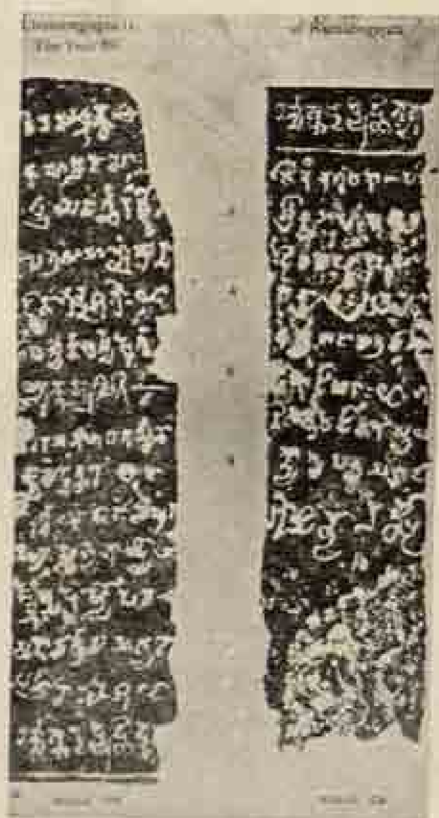
Udayagiri Cave Inscription of Chandra Gupta II



Sanchi Stone Inscription of Chandra Gupta II



Mathura Stone Inscription of Chandra Gupta II



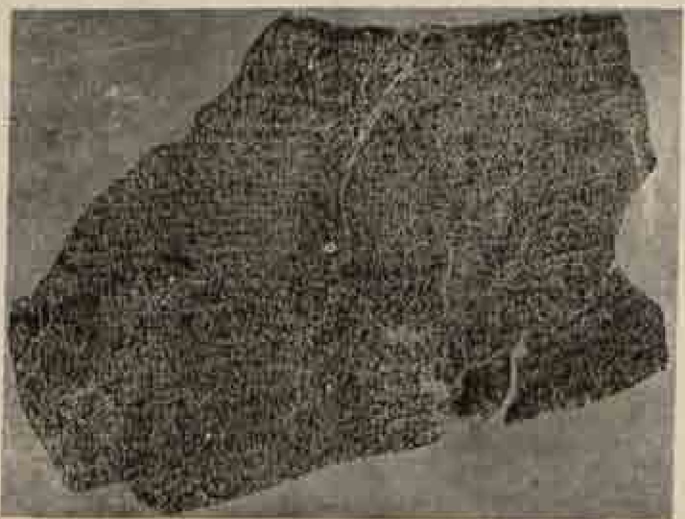
Gadhwa Stone Inscription of Chandra Gupta II
& Kumara Gupta I



Bilsad Stone Pillar Inscription of Kumara Gupta I



Bhitari Stone Pillar Inscription of Skanda Gupta



Junagadh Rock Inscription of Skanda Gupta



Kartikeya, Bharat Kala Bhawan



A Skirted female figure, Mathura



Preaching Buddha, Sarnath



Buddha, Mathura



Varaha, Udayagiri Cavs



Nagaraja-Ajanta



Flying figures, Deogarh



Anantasayana Vishnu, Dasavatara Temple, Deogarh

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